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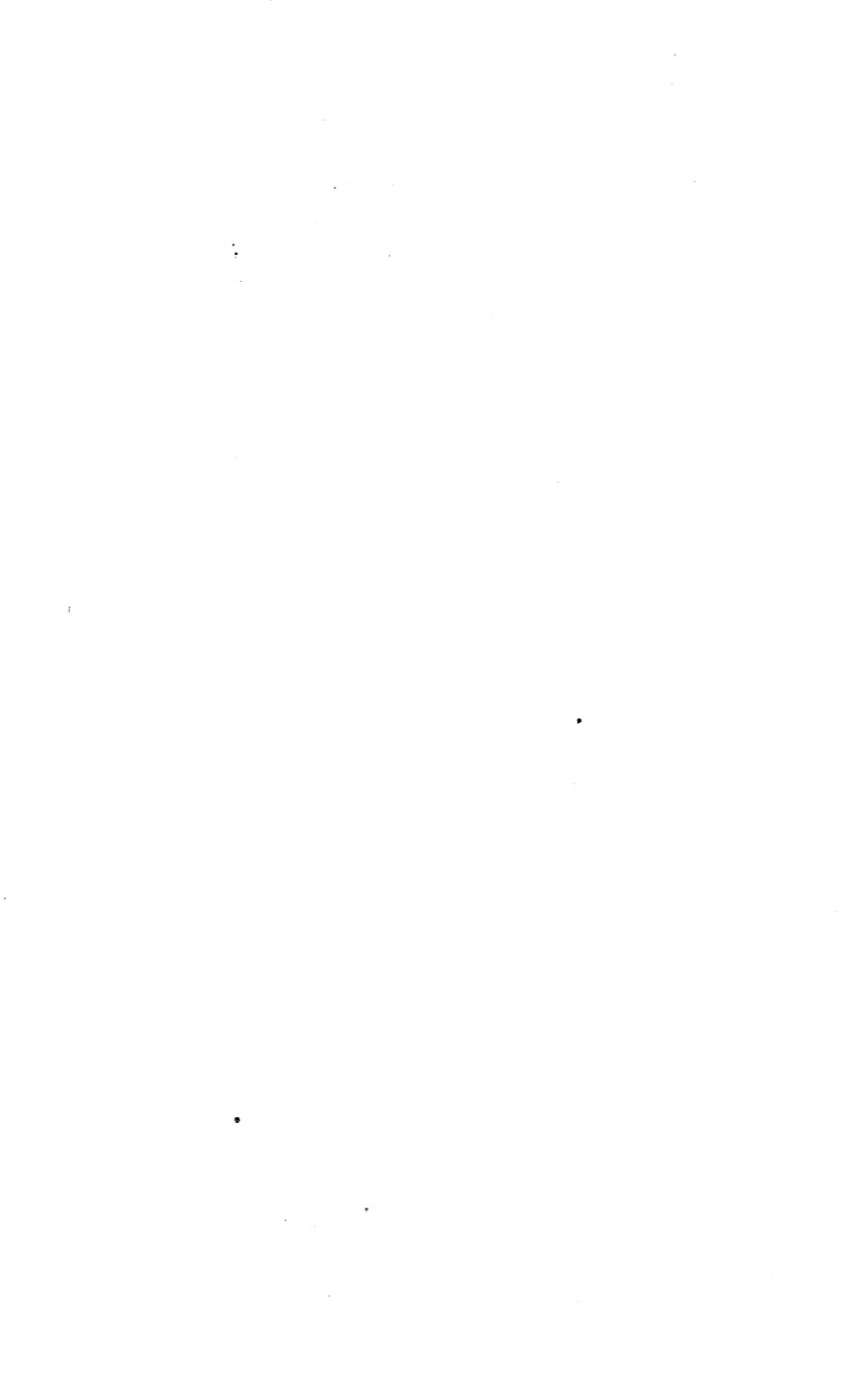
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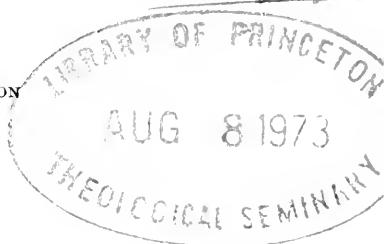




*My dear friend G. J. Hope*  
Nov 12<sup>th</sup> 1865

# PASTORAL COUNSELS:

BEING PAPERS ON



PRACTICAL AND DEVOTIONAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE

✓  
REV. JOHN ROBERTSON, D.D.,

GLASGOW CATHEDRAL.

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THE FOLLOWING PAGES,

PREPARED FOR

THE USE OF MY CONGREGATION,

ARE INSCRIBED

WITH REGARD AND GRATITUDE

TO

MY VALUED FRIEND,

W. T. GAIRDNER, M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE IN THE UNIVERSITY  
OF GLASGOW.



## PREFATORY NOTE.

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BEING for the present prevented by ill health from the discharge of my usual duties, but being allowed by my medical advisers to spend an hour or two daily at my desk, I have been anxious to do something for the good of my Congregation and Parish. Accordingly, I have prepared the following pages, which, I know, my Congregation will not be unwilling to consider a gift, when I tell them that any profit which may arise from the sale of the present issue will be applied to the support of our Parish Missions. Through the kindness of the Publishers, there will be no deduction, save of necessary expenses.

In selecting matter for this little Volume, I have confined myself to subjects of a practical kind. I have not entered upon questions either of controversy or of speculation, farther than to state my views on the spirit in which they ought to be pursued.

J. R.

ST. ANDREWS, *November, 1864.*



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## I.

### HOW WE SHOULD THINK OF GOD.

PSALM cxxxix. 7—"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"

‘NOT any whither, O my God. From Thy Spirit I do not desire to go; from Thy presence I do not wish to hide myself. Thou art not mine enemy; *they* are mine enemies who would make me think so. My sins, my doubts, my unbelief—*they* are mine enemies; but *Thou* my Friend, my Father. I do not wish to flee from Thee; it is my hope and joy to be near Thee; the Lord is my strength and my song, and He is become my salvation.’

Such, undoubtedly, was the Psalmist's tone of feeling when he wrote the remarkable Psalm from which the words at the head of this paper have been selected. He was thinking of the presence of God, not as a source of terror, but as his highest comfort and blessing.

He says, for example, in the ninth and tenth

verses: "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." "Lead" me, "hold" me:—it was the "leading" grace, the "holding" or upholding grace of God, the Psalmist had in view; not the terrors of His presence as the Witness and Avenger of sin.

Again he says in the eighth verse, "If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there." As regards the first clause of this verse there is no difficulty. It is the special presence of God that gives its glory to "heaven." But "hell" is a terrible word. It calls up terrible ideas. In this passage, however, as in many others, it simply means the invisible state, or state of the dead;—and what the Psalmist intends is, that even the state of the dead had no terrors to him; even in that state he would still be under the Divine guardianship; the grave would be to him merely a resting-place; and so he speaks of "making his bed" in it.

And yet once more let us call to recollection the concluding verses of the Psalm: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me." Could the Psalmist have used such

language—could he have prayed such a prayer,—had the uppermost idea in his mind been that of God the Avenger? Undoubtedly he could not; he durst not. Who durst pray to God the Avenger, “Search me, O God?” The Psalmist was able to pray that prayer because the idea that had possession of his mind was a different idea from this; not God the Avenger, but God the Physician; the Enemy of sin, but the Friend of the sinner; the Destroyer of sin, but the Saviour of the sinner; the Saviour of the sinner, in being the Destroyer of sin. ‘Not from Thee, therefore, O my God, but unto Thee; not *from* Thee do I hide myself, but *in* Thee rather, from all my troubles and from all my fears.’

As it was one of the earliest, so it has always been, and it continues to be, one of the most noticeable and fatal effects of sin, to produce in the mind of the sinner a disposition to flee from the presence of the Lord. We are told that shortly after the Fall, when our first parents heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. It was most natural. We can understand it easily. Our own feelings explain it to us. What reluctance we are sensible of, even those who are most spiritu-

ally minded, to come, as it were, into close contact with the Almighty! It is easy—nothing easier—to open the word of His inspiration, and spend an hour over its sacred contents; but to do this in an honestly and thoughtfully self-applicant frame, humbly bringing our own views to God's light, our own lives to God's law,—how difficult we find the exercise! It is easy to kneel in prayer; but to pray actually, to be truly holding communion with God in the spirit, to realise to ourselves that He is indeed beside us, and that we are truly speaking to Him,—to maintain this feeling for even a brief space of time without wandering thoughts,—for the soul thus to ascend, as it were, into the Holiest of all, and, forgetful of the earth and its vanities, to rest there for a little season as in the very presence of Him who dwelleth between the cherubim;—this is real prayer, and how hard we find it to bring ourselves into such a spirit, to continue in such a spirit for only a few brief moments! With what facility we come down again from these high regions to the more congenial level of our ordinary earthliness!

And if we all feel this in some measure, even those who are most devout, how many are there whom their sins drive utterly away from God into complete insensibility of heart! There, for

instance—there is a man who is wholly neglectful of all spiritual interests, whose shadow never darkens a church door, who is altogether dead to the concerns of a higher world. Once he waited upon ordinances; once he used to be seen in the sanctuary of the Lord; once he used to pray to his Maker; but he fell into vicious courses; he became the companion of sinners, and a partaker in their deeds; his Bible rebuked him, he would not read it; the sermons of the preacher rebuked him, he would not go to hear them; he felt rebuked as often as he knelt upon his knees; he fled from the rebuke—fled from God—forsook God's house—gave up prayer—hid himself from the Lord's presence—hid himself to his destruction. Or there again—there is another; a serious conviction was formed in his soul; he was touched with the thought of the nearness of eternity, of the importance of being prepared for eternity; but he did not cherish the conviction; he stifled it; he sought and found relief from it among the world's business or the world's dissipations; he hid himself from the Lord's voice of mercy, and now he is never troubled with a serious idea; not a thought of God disturbs him at all, nor will, perhaps, until that great and terrible day when he shall be awakened at length—

thoroughly awakened—and shall call (but then in vain) to the rocks and the mountains to fall upon him and hide him from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.

But now let us consider, farther, that as it has ever been, and still is, one of the effects of sin to produce a disposition in the mind of the sinner to be afraid of God and to seek concealment from Him, so, on the other hand, the great object of all His merciful dealings with our race has been to correct that disposition, and lead us rather to draw near to Him as our Father and our Friend.

Why did God appear to our first parents on the occasion referred to already, and why did He summon them from their concealment among the trees of the garden? To punish them for their sin? Yes, with that object partly. Sin must be punished. In the order of God's holy government, sin must be punished. But not with that object only; with another object as well. To punish them for their sin by expelling them from Eden; but, at the same time, to hold out to them the prospect of a better Eden, and tell them of a Saviour through whom it might be reached; to give them, in this way, a ground of hope, a blessed assurance, that, grievously though they had sinned

against Him, He was still their Father, whom they need not flee from at all, but whom they might trust to work out their deliverance from both sin and misery.

Such was the purpose of God's very first manifestation of Himself after the Fall. Such was the purpose, more or less directly, of all His subsequent manifestations of Himself to the Patriarchal Church and to the Jewish Church. And is it not the same thing which the blessed gospel of Christ tells *us* likewise,—that we need not flee from God,—that we may rather flee to God,—that there is love in Him towards us all? People *will* continue to think that Christ came to save them from God; they *will* continue to form an idea of God as a stern, harsh, tyrannical Being, from whom Christ came to procure their deliverance. It is not so. Nothing can be farther from the truth. It is entirely a mistake, and a mistake too that endangers the very existence of true religion. True religion consists (there is the highest authority for saying so) first and chiefly in loving the Lord our God with all our heart. But we cannot love because we are bidden; much less can we be forced or frightened into love. We must be drawn. And how shall we be drawn to God so long as we are under the dominion of

such dark ideas as those that have been mentioned? Let us disabuse ourselves of them. They are wholly unscriptural. They are in direct opposition to the Scriptures. What do the Scriptures say? "In this was manifested the love of God, that He set forth His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In this *was manifested*; not by this was produced. Christ did not come to make God love His creatures. He came because God loved His creatures: "God so loved the world, as to give His only-begotten." It is the uniform doctrine of Scripture that the whole method of redemption originated in God's love; and we should settle this in our minds as a first principle in all our thought upon the subject. Let us magnify the love of Christ in dying for us; but let us also magnify the love of the Father in giving Him to die. Never let us conceive of Christ as extorting salvation from God's reluctant hand, but always as the Sent of God,—sent, because in His wonderful mercy God desired our salvation. We have in Christ, not a way of escape from God, but a way of access to God. He died for us, we are told, that we might have "boldness to enter into the Holiest." It was necessary, in the order of the Divine government, for some reasons we can partly understand, probably for others also



too deep for us to fathom, that there should be an atonement for our guilt; but then it was the love of God which provided this atonement. Therefore let us see in Christ the benignity of God. Let us see in His work, not a means of deliverance out of the hands of God, but the strongest of all reasons for casting ourselves into the hands of God, as the very best friend we have in the universe.

There are those who would seem to imagine that the principal reason for worshipping God is the same reason for which some nations worship the Evil One, namely, the harm He may do them—not the good He is doing them daily; not the excellent holiness of His character, nor the exceeding riches of His grace; but the harm He may do them by casting them into hell. Strangely, it is hardly considered by some to be preaching the gospel at all, unless views of God are set forth which have a tendency, to say the least, to leave an impression of this sort upon the mind. Strangely, I say, for gospel means good news—and what is the good news? Not surely that there is a wrath which shall consume the workers of iniquity, but that we may escape this wrath by escaping through God's loving help from those iniquities which bring it down. What is the gospel but just God's good and blessed news to man, that

we need not be afraid of drawing near to Him, notwithstanding all our sins; but may cherish, on the contrary, the sure and certain hope, both that He will grant us forgiveness for the past on our humbly seeking it, and also that He will educate our souls into righteousness and peace by the training of His providence and the grace of His sanctifying Spirit? I do not make little of "the terrors of the Lord." There is a wrath against unrighteousness which is truly fearful. But I protest, at the same time, that our gracious Father in Heaven is not to be represented merely or chiefly as an object of dread. I protest that the gospel *is* a gospel, a revelation of mercy; and if it warns us of wrath, its uniform purpose is that we may flee to a Saviour who is freely offered to us all.

Teach these things to your children. When you speak to them of a wonderful Being who is present throughout all the world, and knows the very thoughts and intents of their hearts, and when you teach them to remember, "Thou, God, seest me," let your words and your tone be as if you were speaking of One who is indeed to be had in the profoundest reverence, but who is not so much to be dreaded as to be trusted and loved—of One who is more than all to them that you yourself can ever

be, who is seeking their good with more than your own earnestness, and whom to grieve by any disobedience is therefore not only a fault to be punished, but a meanness and a wickedness to be shrunk from. Thus will you implant in their hearts the true and living root of genuine piety.

And let us all consider, as they may be applicable to ourselves, the same great though simple truths.

If by chance these words should reach any one who is living in careless indifference, or in open sin, let him consider how he is grieving the heart of God, and how, at the same time, he is throwing away his own best blessings. How infinitely happier one's life would be if he would only accept God's invitations, and live in fellowship with Him!

If any one is touched with religious convictions, let him look upon them as a voice of the Lord God speaking in his heart, and let him not flee from that voice, but hear it reverently. One may seek escape from his convictions among the vanities and frivolities of the world, and one may find it there for a time. But when the frivolities of the world have all passed away, and the world itself has been burned up, where will the peace be that is found in the shelter of so miserable an asylum? In all the universe, let us be well assured, there is but one place

of security from the wrath of God,—it is in the bosom of God.

If any are timid and hesitant, let them cast aside their fears, and base an humble boldness on the faith of God's great mercy. The Evil One may insinuate distrust. It has been his policy from the beginning to suggest to the heart that there are fatal barriers between us and our Father. He knows that, just as he can keep us at a distance from God, or lead us in any way to restrict or narrow the riches of God's love, just in that proportion he will succeed in hindering our growth in holiness, our progress towards salvation. But why should we believe the father of lies? Why not rather the God of truth and goodness?

Finally, let all of us endeavour to realise more and more the presence of God with us at all times, and in all circumstances. This is godliness—to acknowledge God as our ever-present Friend, with whom we rejoice to hold counsel habitually. This is true religion here on earth, and the best preparation for that future world where we hope to dwell for ever in the light of God's countenance.

## II.

### GOD'S PURPOSE AND MAN'S PERVERSITY.

LUKE xiii. 34—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!"

It seems impossible to think that in thus speaking of His many endeavours for the good of Jerusalem, our Lord could have referred merely to what He had done during the short period of His public ministry, and in the course of the few visits He had paid to the Holy City. We cannot but feel that the signification of His words is much larger. It seems evident they were meant to relate, not to His personal and visible ministry alone, but to that of the prophets also, and of all the other Divine messengers who had gone before Him. They were *His* messengers, and their work was *His* work. In short, He is speaking here as the "Angel of the Covenant,"

who was "before Abraham," by whose instrumentality the work of Divine grace had been carried on ever since the beginning of the world, and who was the Mediator of the Old Testament as well as of the New.

In these days, when people are telling us that it is a mistake to think that our Lord ever claimed to be more than the human son of Mary, it is important to notice every indication to the contrary which His own language affords. These indications are numerous; and the one before us is to be counted among them. Wonderful thought! this Jesus—this humble Galilean—this citizen of distant Nazareth—who was preaching and teaching from place to place in company with a few fishermen and peasants,—this was He, manifest in the flesh, by whom God in the beginning made the worlds—by whom from the first the whole method of Divine grace had been conducted—who appeared to Abraham at his tent-door, and gave him the promise that he should be the father of many nations—with whom Jacob wrestled at Peniel, and who spoke to Moses from the burning bush—who appeared to Joshua as the Captain of the Host of the Lord—who gave to David his might, and to Solomon his wisdom—who inspired the Psalmists

and the Prophets—who touched Isaiah's lips with fire, and shewed Ezekiel his visions of God—who conducted, in a word, the whole of that Divine Economy by which the goodness and long-suffering of the Most High were so wonderfully illustrated, and the way was prepared for the nobler and more comprehensive dispensation of the gospel.

When there is a bright light falling upon any object, there is ever also a dark shadow which that object projects—all the darker from the very contrast. It is thus there shews itself to us in the words of our Lord not only something that is bright and glorious—the patient love of the Almighty,—but also something that is dark and awful—the obstinacy and ingratitude of the human heart. “How often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not!” “*And ye would not*”—words full of mystery and of warning.

Words full of mystery. It is the great mystery of the world that there should be an Almighty Being, governing all things, doing all things as He pleaseth, and knowing the end from the beginning,—and yet that man should have free will. That it should be possible to use the language which our Lord employs—that it should be possible to say concerning man's relation to any Divine

purpose, "Ye would not,"—this, I repeat, is the grand mystery of the world—not of religion alone, as some would allege, but of all thought and all philosophy,—the grand mystery into which all other mysteries concerning God and man run up, and in which they culminate. You have seen a bank of clouds fringed all round with a thin and shining and all but transparent border of more or less depth; but as your eye is directed away from this shining margin towards the centre of the mass, its density becomes greater and greater, till at length it is wholly impenetrable to sight. Thus in regard to God and man. There is, as it were, a border region of light, comprising that realm of practical duties and obligations, concerning which it is important that every man should have the means of clear vision. There is a border region of this sort surrounding life and thought; but when we turn our gaze towards those deeper questions into which, by life and thought, it can hardly fail to be sometimes carried; when we ask about human depravity and human perversity, and how it can be that it should ever be said of men, "Ye will not," when God has said, "I will;" when we go back in this way towards the central region of the Divine purposes and decrees, then do we feel that clouds



and thick darkness are the habitation of God's throne.

And yet all is not darkness either. You have sometimes seen in the case of such a bank of clouds as we have been describing,—at the very centre—at the very densest, most impenetrable part—near where the mass is darkest and most impervious to your sight,—you have seen just there a chink in the cloud, through which the sun shines gloriously. It is thus that the Most High has opened a window in heaven—has opened, just where the human eye becomes most anxious and most unable to penetrate the Divine purposes,—a window of light, declaring Himself, in Christ, to be the Father of mercies, and assuring us in a way to silence every hesitation and suspicion, that, whatever we may sometimes be tempted to think, He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Thus there is light in two quarters. There is light round the border of the world of life and thought, so that for the most part we can see our duty, if we are willing to look at it. And, thank God, there is light at the centre. Although in following out those dark questions which we can hardly help sometimes putting, we may be perplexed, and even altogether fail to

see our way, thank God, there is light at the centre; we know that the throne of God is a throne of grace.

But, farther, those words, "Ye would not," are words of warning. There is something awful about them, as well as something mysterious. The day was at hand when Jerusalem would be given up to the destroyer, and the abomination of desolation would be seen in the Holy Place; and for this Jerusalem had herself to blame. On nations and on individuals must ever lie the burden of their own responsibility. Now, there is something awful in this—something no other word will fittingly describe. It were miserable to be the sport of circumstance or the slaves of fate, having no control over our own destiny, but dragged blindly hither and thither by the strong hand of an irresistible necessity, or drifting purposeless on the current of events. This were miserable and degrading. But to possess the gift of freedom, and have the control, so to speak, of all eternity, in so far as regards our own prospects for it, is solemn and awful. That in the voyage of life it should be ours not to float merely with the stream as the playthings of accident, but to spread the sails to the varying breeze, and to hold the rudder in our hands, so that it depends on our

own carefulness whether we shall reach the islands of the blest, or make shipwreck amid thick inhospitable darkness; this gives to life a character of momentousness it is solemn to contemplate, and to our actions and course of conduct in it a degree of importance it is almost overwhelming to realise. And yet it belongs to us to realise it as we can,—nay, indeed, is of the highest consequence. Should we abuse or neglect the mercy of the Lord, how it will sting us afterwards when we are reminded, whether by His voice or by that of our own conscience, that it has not been because we wanted opportunity of better things that condemnation has come upon us! It will be a sore thought: ‘How often, O Lord, Thou didst invite me under the shadow of Thy wings, to be safe there for ever and ever; but I would not, I would not!’

The same words, however, which in one aspect are thus words of warning, are also words of encouragement and great comfort when looked at in another light. “Ye would not” implies that *God would* and *our Saviour would*. In neither of the two instances in which it occurs in the verse is the word “would” the mere sign of a tense. It is the translation of a word which stands in the original as a separate word; and the verse might be read—

“How often I *willed* to have gathered thy children together, but ye *willed* it not!” It is not, therefore, to draw a forced inference from our Saviour's language, but simply to bring out its literal meaning, when we make the remark we have done. “I *willed*,” He says, “one way, but ye *willed* another.” There was a Divine purpose in one direction, but the perversity of man thwarted it. Let us not perplex ourselves just now with the metaphysical difficulties that may be raised concerning this, which, as we have seen already, is the great mystery of life and thought. Let us be content with what the Scriptures tell us plainly. And this they tell us plainly,—it is indeed the burden of all they tell us—it is the sum of their message—it is the very ray of light which shines gloriously through the clouds and thick darkness which are the habitation of God's throne,—that there is a purpose of mercy towards the sinner in the mind of the Most High—a purpose of mercy for the pardon of our sins, and the education of our nature out of sin into holiness.

Now, we have here encouragement and great comfort. If we feel ourselves deep sunk in the fearful pit and miry clay of moral perversity and pollution, here is a hand stretched out to help

us upwards, and set our feet upon a rock, and establish our goings. If we feel the power of temptation, here is One that is for us greater than all they that can be against us. If there arise within us, as there often must within all minds of even a small degree of serious reflectiveness, a painful sense of that firm grasp which moral evil has obtained upon us, and of our own infirmity and inability to shake it off, here is a purpose of the Almighty of which we can take hold, and by which we may console and strengthen ourselves until in our weakness His strength is made perfect.

The great thing for us all to believe and hold fast is that God has a purpose of mercy towards us for our spiritual education into His own likeness, and so for our final participation in His own bliss. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, in which let us pray God to stablish and settle us. We cannot believe it too firmly or with too little reserve. The less reserve the better. It is this gospel which awakens to repentance; for how can a man ever feel that he is sinning, or has anything to repent of, except as he sees, with more or less clearness, that he is going against a purpose of the Almighty? It is this gospel which kindles gratitude and love; for what can elicit these emotions if it be not that

the Lord has done so much to carry out His purpose, giving up for that end even His own Son to death? It is this gospel, too, which, more than anything else, nerves the soul for the battle of life, and enables it to fight its fight with strenuous patience; for he, surely, above all other men, may well both work and wait, who sees the Lord upon his side, and knows it to be the Lord's purpose of which he is seeking the fulfilment in himself and in the world. That there are lessons in every day and in every event; that the Divine Father is daily sending us out to be trained in something which, as His children, we need to know and practise,—this is the gospel concerning life and labour, and who does not see what a new interest and usefulness it gives to them? What a real gospel! what substantial good news! for a world always of work and care—oftentimes of no little trial and sorrow—that all our works, and cares, and trials, and sorrows belong to God's purpose for the purification of our nature, and the development in us of His own likeness, and of His own bliss, so that in them all there is precious wealth for wisdom to look for, and lay hold of, and store up as a treasure that may be carried beyond death and the grave.

Thus we have found in our Saviour's words an

instructive example of the riches of God's grace in granting opportunities, and of the folly and perversity too often shewn by men in throwing them away. Let us apply the example to ourselves, under a humble and solemn sense of our responsibility. To us the word of the gospel has more fully come than to those of old times, to whom it was preached by the various messengers who were sent to prepare the way for the coming of our Lord, and therefore surely "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

### III.

#### THE BLESSEDNESS OF DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.

PSALM lxxiii. 20—"It is good for me to draw near to God."

YES, truly. There can be nothing better for a man than to draw near to God.

It would sweeten our prosperity. When the world is smiling upon us, and our affairs are progressing smoothly, and there is peace and plenty in our homes, I am sure we should neither prosper less, nor enjoy our prosperity less, if we were living near to God, in the habitual and thankful acknowledgment of Him as the Author of it all. I am sure the day's work would be done with none the less of spirit and manly energy because we prayed in the morning that God would give us our daily bread. We should not relish less the fruits with which our industry is crowned because we received them as the answer to our prayer, and, discerning in them the paternal beneficence of the Most



High, accepted them as tokens of His love, and pledges, therefore, of still better blessings yet to come. Nor are our peaceful homes the less agreeable asylums from the strife and turmoil of the world because the name of God is written upon our roof-tree; and, thankful to Him for their manifold amenities, we regard them as the type and prediction of a still more blissful home above.

Often we forget the Giver amid the abundance of His gifts; but in the very forgetting of the Giver is not the abundance of the gifts diminished? Do not we lose the best gift of all? For is not the best gift of all a sense of the Giver's love? What is so valuable in the gifts of God as the revelation they contain of the heart of God? Yes, this is the best thing in all things that are good, that they come from a good God, and are revelations of His goodness; and it is then, and then only, we obtain out of them all the blessedness that is in them, when they are known and felt to be such, and received as such. The godless voluptuary, adept though he believes himself in the arts of enjoyment, is but the poorest novice in them after all; for what an infinitely sweeter delightfulness there is in things than *he* knows how to draw out of them, ignorant as he is of the heavenly promise of which earth's gifts are full to

those who discern in the gifts the bounty of the Great Bestower! The godless money-maker, wise though he may be to gather gold and silver, is a fool and blind as to the best of all the treasures earth has to supply; for is not *this* the best, the prophecy that lies in every blessing, when received as a paternal grace to us unworthy, of a still richer and nobler inheritance?

And we need not restrict the argument to mere grovelling voluptuaries and worshippers of wealth, but we may extend it to minds of a higher order. He who can penetrate with subtle intellect the secrets of the universe,—does not *he* miss the best and happiest secret of all if he fail to receive into his heart the testimony which it bears to that Great Being who is not only its Author but “*Our Father?*” What a cold and hard thing the system of nature is when looked at merely as a system of nature, and not as a revelation of the living God! How it fails to disclose its highest beauty, not only to the eye of the man of science, but even to that of the artist or the poet, so long as it witnesses nothing to him of that Infinite One whose embodied thought it is—so long as the face of the world is to him like an illuminated page, with the tracery and colouring of which he is so occupied

that he sees not the letters of the name that is written, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth!" There is nothing fair but it grows fairer—there is nothing pleasant but it grows pleasanter—when it is traced up to the great Fountain of all good and perfect gifts. It would double every blessing to receive it as from Him. It would make it twice a blessing—a blessing for what it is, and a blessing for what it promises—a blessing for what it ministers to our necessities or enjoyments here below, and a blessing (how much more precious still) for what it shews us of Him above, with whom are all the blessings we can ever need either here or hereafter. Truly, therefore, "it is good for us to draw near to God."

As it would sweeten our blessings, so it would also lighten our burdens. To no man is there ever granted a course of unmingled enjoyment all the way from the cradle to the grave. The sun never shines in the climate in which we now are—the climate of this earthly life of ours—the whole day through from dawn to nightfall. And when the clouds cover the sky is it not good to draw near to God? Is it not in His presence, is it not from His face that the light shineth eternally? When mis-

fortunes come, when griefs arise, when burdens oppress us, what so powerful to alleviate these misfortunes, to assuage these griefs, to lighten the weight of these burdens, as to call into our thoughts the remembrance of Him, and to fix our gaze on the grand proof He has vouchsafed us in the Cross and Passion of our Redeemer, that all things are arranged in loving-kindness towards good ends, and that, as at once the merciful Father and the great Educator, He appoints our sorrows for the uprooting from within us of that sin, which, were it allowed to remain, would spring up some day into a sorrow still more painful?

But there is not so much need to dwell upon the value of the comforts of religion in time of trouble as to make this other observation:—If we desire to enjoy the advantage which arises from drawing near to God at such seasons, we would require to be much more careful than we are to live near Him always. We know it would be a blessing to draw near to Him in the hour of distress; but how can we expect to be able to do so, at least easily and with freedom, when we are so unfamiliar with the way as many of us are? Is it not often to be observed that men in trouble, who see it would be good for them to draw near to God—who

actually try to draw near to God—who betake themselves to prayer—who ask their friends to pray for them,—are far from deriving all the comfort from these sources which they would wish to derive, and which they expected to derive? But is this wonderful? is it wonderful in the least degree? To draw near to God is not a local movement, but a spiritual exercise; and is it wonderful that a man should find it difficult in his times of distress, who has been wholly unpractised in it in happier and more peaceful days? Let us never forget it is now we have to prepare for the days of our affliction, and if it will be good for us then, for that reason it is good for us always to be in fellowship with the Most High.

But there is something worse to contend with than the griefs and afflictions of this mortal life:—there is sin; if we be not delivered from our sin, no other deliverance is much worth speaking of.

And how then as to our sin? When the sense of it springs up in our hearts, to whom can we go but unto God? Is there any other in earth or heaven? Who else can pardon us our trespasses but the great Sovereign against whom they have been committed? Shall any one but God forgive, when it is God that has been dishonoured? Is it not to Him that mercy “belongeth?” And then as to the other

equally important question, How to be delivered from the power of our sins, is not the answer still the same? As forgiveness is of God only, so is sanctification. If none but the Sovereign can forgive, who but the Father of our spirits can create a new heart? In ourselves we are weak and corrupt. We feel it daily. How easily our vows are broken! How readily we give way to temptations! How much we feel within ourselves of a temper and desires that lead us into guilt! And in what way can we hope to be delivered from all this, if it be not by drawing near to God, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, and who has promised to give that Spirit to them that ask Him?

It only remains to say that it is just in the degree in which we are entering daily into a more complete fellowship with God that we are realising in our lives a genuine Christianity. To tell us that through Christ our Lord and Head we may draw near to God, in the sure and certain hope of meeting with a welcome, is the grand message of the gospel, and to help us nearer and yet nearer is the grand use of gospel ordinances, and providential discipline. And let us not take any narrow views of what the means of drawing near to God are. Prayer, and sacraments, and gospel ordinances are paths by

which we may approach Him. They are paths our Saviour has opened up. But there are other paths too. Everything in this world may be used as a path towards God. Everything in this world may be used, if we are foolish, as a means of concealment from God. Our daily blessings may be used in this way. Our common occupations may be used in this way. Prayer, and sacraments, and the Bible may be used in this way too. A man may make his prayers, and his church attendance, and his reading of the Scriptures, an excuse for the absence of all earnest, living thought concerning God, and of all real fellowship with Him. A man may hide himself from God, not only among the trees of the garden, but even among the pillars of the temple.

On the other hand, as all things, even religious ordinances, may be used as means of concealment from God, so all things, even those which men call secular, may be used as means of drawing near to Him. The beauty with which He has decked our earthly dwelling-place—the glorious sunlight—the leafy verdure of the woods—the melodious murmur of the glancing streams—the stillness of the calm lake sleeping among the mountains—the little wild-flowers that fringe its shores, each arrayed

in a glory greater than that of Solomon,—it is all a disclosure of our Father's goodness, given us to make us thankful children. The kind affections He has placed within our breast—the thousand nameless pleasantnesses of social and domestic life—these likewise shew Him to us, and among their uses none is higher than to lead our hearts to Him. The daily comforts we enjoy are meant to awaken in us that which doubles them all—the spirit of gratitude and trust. If we are led among the green pastures, it is that the thought may arise in our hearts, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” And if, at another time, our path is in the wilderness, it is that we may be prevented from losing sight, among the things of time and sense, of Him whom to see and know in the Spirit is life eternal. Be it our ambition,—and let this ambition guide us in the use we seek to make of all things,—that we shall be continually coming to know God better, and to be more in harmony with Him. Then will all things be to us purposeful and beneficent; then all our works, and cares, and trials here below will be a precious schooling to make us ready for a happier state; then will the things that are seen, and temporal, and perishing, be interfused with unseen and unperishing substance; then, in a word, the



world in which we now are will become to us no longer an unholy place, but, as it were, the vestibule of God's great sanctuary, through which we are going forward towards that inner fane, which is radiant with the brightness of His unveiled face, and where pealeth the celestial music.

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## IV.

### ON THE IMITATION OF CHRIST.

JOHN xiii. 15—"For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

OUR Lord had just girded Himself with a towel, and washed the disciples' feet. This was the action He said He had done for an example. Of course, it cannot be supposed that this example is to be copied literally—that this same action, an action suitable in the climate and according to the customs of Judea, but which would be wholly inappropriate in many other countries, is to be repeated in a mechanical manner. Unquestionably that is not what our Lord meant. What He meant was, not to call for the mechanical repetition of an action, but to illustrate a spirit; to teach His disciples to be humble and serviceable to one another, and to deem it an honour and privilege to minister to one another. No doubt this was His intention—this the kind of imitation He desired. By an action suitable to the time and

place, He sought to illustrate a spirit which His true followers would require to preserve in all times and places down to the end of the world, though in each time and each place it might find a different expression. It may be, perhaps, that an action so inconsistent with the manners and customs of many parts of the world was made choice of by our Saviour for this purpose, just that we might see distinctly that what is required at our hands is a copying of the spirit and not a barren and formal imitation of details.

Many of the things which Christ did were things in respect of which it is not in our power to copy Him literally. He healed the sick, and cleansed the lepers, and raised the dead, and cast out devils. No such miraculous powers are in our possession. But are Christ's miracles no example to us? Are they to be excluded from the catalogue of things in respect of which we are to follow His steps? Not so. Though we cannot work miracles, yet in the working of *His* miracles, Christ displayed a spirit into which we can enter, and which we can exhibit in the common affairs of life. He displayed a sympathy with the afflicted, which we can likewise shew in a thousand forms by deeds of kindness and compassion. He shewed a desire to abate the evils

that afflict humanity, which we too can exhibit by a thousand different manifestations, as circumstances emerge. He shewed a goodness and a love which may be embodied in even so small an action as the giving of a cup of cold water in His name.

St Peter tells us that "He suffered for us, leaving us an example." Now, in one aspect, there is nothing in Christ's whole history that can less be repeated in the lives of His followers than His sufferings. They were propitiatory sufferings; but the sufferings of men who are themselves sinful can never have that character. Yet, in another point of view, there is nothing in the history of Christ we should rather regard as an example. What a specimen they afford us of meekness under injury—of single-hearted and most child-like, yet most manly submission to the will of God—of patient, self-sacrificing love! We therefore can copy Christ in respect even of His sufferings, by striving to maintain a patient, uncomplaining spirit under the various griefs and trials which come upon us from time to time. Nor only so; but in a still higher sense we can, as it were, partake in His very sufferings themselves by entering into those of the needy and the afflicted; and, though at an immeasurable distance, we can imitate His sacrifice, by

sacrificing ourselves, in those countless ways for which daily life is ever affording opportunity, for the mitigation of the sorrows and the advancement of the welfare of our fellow-creatures. It would seem to be of this kind of fellowship in the sufferings of Christ that St Paul was thinking, when, in writing to the Colossians, he used the memorable words—"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church."

With a view, then, to such a copying of Christ as we have thus attempted to describe, it is necessary, first, that by frequent and reverent meditation upon His character, as set forth in Holy Scripture, we should endeavour, with God's help, to understand its principles, appreciate its beauty, and take up its tone.

No man ever became a good poet or a good artist by mere mechanical imitation. At the same time, it does not follow that the study of the best models is therefore of no use. On the contrary, it is in many respects of high advantage. In the case of the poet, it accustoms the ear to the rhythm of poetic numbers, and the taste to the graces of poetic expression; while it aids the whole mind towards that

delicacy of apprehension and that quick perception and appreciation of what is beautiful, pathetic, or sublime, on which excellence in the poetic art so largely depends. In the same way, the architect and the painter visit Rome or Florence to study the buildings and galleries in these cities; not with a view to the reproduction of precisely the same forms or the same colouring; but in order that their minds may be filled by reverent study with the spirit of the great old masters, and they may express a similar spirit in original compositions of their own. It is just thus that by frequent meditation on the character of Christ, and especially by sitting much at the foot of His cross, we should strive, not without prayer, to apprehend the principles on which His life proceeded, and so to imbibe the spirit of that life as that it shall animate our own thought and our own activity, and manifest itself, though in different actions, yet in similar Righteousness and Love.

There must be, secondly, an habitual exercising of our intelligence in applying the principles of Christ's life to the regulation of our daily conduct. The life of Christ is given in the Scriptures very briefly. We know almost nothing of the manner in which He spent His youth, and only a small part

of the events and transactions of the three busy years of His public ministry has been recorded. It is a wise arrangement that the life of Christ should have been thus briefly told. It is best that the Bible should have been, as it is, a short book, and the gospel histories, in particular, short histories. Enough is recorded to shew us very thoroughly what were the grand principles on which our Lord lived,—what and how admirable. There is enough to enable us to apprehend the tenderness of His love and the beauty of His holiness. More could have served no better purpose. No good could have come from greater detail. For in no circumstances can the life of any man be a detailed copy of the life of any other man. In no circumstances could the life of any Christian have been a detailed copy of the life of Christ. Every life must be, to a large extent, original. The great thing is, that it be guided by right principles. The circumstances in which these principles fall to be applied vary infinitely. What we get from the life of Christ, viewed as our example, is an exhibition of right principles, and we could not get more; and the fewer, and broader, and clearer, and more distinct and telling the touches by which the great picture is brought out, the more universally useful it is

fitted to be,—the more it raises us above mere questions of casuistry,—the more it shews us the importance of the spirit above the letter,—and the more it does us real service, by inducing us to exercise the powers which God has given us, so as to fill up aright the details of our own conduct.

For these reasons, it is evidently best that the history of Christ, as recorded by the evangelists, should have been brief. And for these reasons, too, it is necessary that, in order to copy Christ, there should be a daily, living, active use of our own powers. We are to love one another, as Christ loved us all; but in what way that love is to be expressed in the various combinations of circumstances that arise from day to day, we must for ourselves judge and determine. We are to be meek and gentle and peaceable, patient and forgiving, as Christ was; but how to manifest these qualities affords room for the daily exercise of our intelligence, and is therefore a means of daily improvement. It is thus we rightly endeavour to build up the temple of our own lives to the glory of God. The method is, by reverently seeking to receive into our hearts the spirit of Christ, and then, in the use of our own faculties, and with prayer for continual help from



above, striving to embody that spirit in our character and conversation.

With prayer, I say, for continual help from above;—for any one who strives to copy Christ will soon find that, in order to his doing so, this help is necessary. He will find, by the experience of many weaknesses and shortcomings, that he needs to be sustained inwardly by Divine Grace. He will come to see ever more and more clearly how essentially it belongs to the scheme of salvation, that our great Example should be also more than our Example—that He who has set us a pattern of holy behaviour, should also have purchased for His people the pardon of their sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. He will learn that to walk in the footsteps of Christ, we need to be partakers in the life which is hid with Christ in God. The more one apprehends the grandeur of the Christian model, the more one ever feels that a model merely is not enough; the more one rejoices to believe that He who left us an example, lives to guide us in the way, and the more one is taught to make daily and fervent supplication for the maintenance within him by the Divine mercy of a living union with the living Lord.

## V.

### CHRIST'S IMPOSSIBILITIES.

MATT. xxvii. 41, 42—"Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

THESE chief priests, and scribes, and elders,—they were educated men—they were ministers of religion,—no doubt they would have felt aggrieved if any one had ventured to insinuate that they were any way deficient in the humane sensibilities becoming their profession and their culture; and yet they gathered round the cross to insult our Saviour when He was dying! What disgraceful cruelty! and what paltry meanness too! They thought they had crushed Him, and surely they might have been content with their triumph. If they could not suffer Him to live, they might at least have let Him die in silence.

There is one thing which will account, and I think there is only one thing which *can* account, for their atrocious behaviour. They were not at ease in

their minds; they were not satisfied in their secret hearts that they had acted in a justifiable manner in the proceedings they had taken against our Lord. There was a still small voice within them, and which they wished to drown, whispering to them that it was not in the interests of justice they had pursued Him to the death. Justice is of God; that God who, even when He finds it necessary to punish, yet "desireth not the death of the sinner." Justice is of God, and like God, smites with sadness. She compassionates while she condemns, and shares in the painfulness of the very blows which herself inflicts. Be sure the man is not thoroughly satisfied of the justice of his own doings, who gloats over and insults the sufferings of his victim. One hardly likes to seek in one's own bosom for an explanation of the conduct of the scribes and priests. But have we never felt, if we have wronged any one, a certain inclination to make him out to ourselves and others a man that deserved the wrong we have done him, and even to heap further injuries upon his head, as if, somehow, these additional wrongs justified the first wrong? Let us be upon our guard against a feeling which has in it the germ of the most atrocious wickedness. It is, let us remember, of the same kind with that which led the Jewish rulers to

disgrace themselves for ever by scoffing at the foot of Calvary. They knew in their hearts that they had wronged our Lord. If they had not known that they had wronged Him, they could have afforded to pity Him.

It is striking here farther to observe, how, at the very time when they imagined they were heaping shame upon their victim, in reality they were not only bringing infamy upon their own heads, but pronouncing, in the very words they used to gibe at Him, the highest eulogium upon His character. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." Without knowing it, they uttered a great truth. Meaning to insult Him, they unconsciously expressed the very nobleness of His most noble spirit. Better language they could not have found to describe what constitutes His very glory—His title to the thankful veneration of all men as long as the world lasts, and to the endless praises of the saints in heaven.

As regarded the physical impossibility of our Lord's having saved Himself, it is hardly necessary to say the priests, and scribes, and elders were utterly mistaken. Except by His own consent He was not helpless in their hands, as they imagined Him to be. It was not they that made Him,—it was Himself

that "*became*" "obedient unto death." To their confusion He might have descended into the midst of them, and shewn Himself the Son of God with power. "No man," He said to His disciples, "taketh my life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." "Thou wouldest have no power at all against Me," He said to Pilate, "except it were given thee from above." "Thinkest thou," He said to Peter, "that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He will presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" And these were no vain boasts. No audacious impostor this, who, bold to the last, was determined to maintain his pretensions against all facts. No impostor this at all. A short time proved it; the third day proved it. Him who could burst the gates of death, was it the cruel nails that held *Him* fast to the accursed tree?

No, it was not the cruel nails—it was love to souls of men. They who jeered at Him and said, "Himself He cannot save," though they were wrong in the sense in which they meant it, were right in another sense, far more elevated and noble. There was no physical impossibility indeed. But to His godly, loving spirit there was a moral one. He could not save Himself, for if He had saved Himself the will

of His Father would not have been accomplished, and the souls of men would have perished. We read that there were great and awful prodigies attendant on the Crucifixion. The earth shook, and there was darkness over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour. But what a still more terrible earthquake might well have shaken the solid world, and what a still more dismal darkness would have closed down upon it for ever, had the constancy of Jesus given way—had He declined His sufferings—had He come down from the cross and left redemption unfinished! How infinite, then, the debt of gratitude we owe to our Redeemer for that wonderful loving-kindness which led Him to endure to the end for our sake! Can we ever pay it with the services of life,—with the praises and the services even of eternity?

What a noble idea it gives us of the character of our Lord, and what a bright example it presents for our imitation, when we consider what it was which thus formed an impossibility to Him!

He had received from the Father a work to do. If He had saved Himself, that work would have failed to be done; but to leave undone what God had appointed was an impossibility to Christ.

He had come into the world for the purpose of

saving sinners. If He had saved Himself that purpose would have failed; but to leave the wretched to perish hopelessly, when He had it in His power to save them, was an impossibility to Christ.

He had been upon the sea when the tempest was abroad. To chide the storm into quietness—to curb the race of the mighty billows, was no impossibility to Him. He had stood beside the grave where friends were weeping for the dead. To call back the departed spirit—to give life and warmth to the dull, cold clay—was no impossibility to Him. But to come down from His own cross—to save Himself from one pang of His own great anguish in bearing our sins in His own body on the tree—*that* was an impossibility to Christ—a thing He could not do.

I repeat, how noble the nature which felt impossibilities of this description! He might, we said, have descended from the cross and shewn Himself the Son of God with power. In real truth, far rather did He shew it by bearing His great sorrow. The rulers taunted Him and said, “If He be the King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.” It was like them to say so. It was in keeping with that miserable, selfish

nature to which everything seems great only as it serves some selfish aim or interest. But to the eye of reason and moral insight was there not something more kingly by far in His patience of love, His superiority to all considerations of a personal kind, His sublime constancy of soul, the glorious victory of His adorable benevolence over all suffering of the flesh, all taunts of the ungodly, all temptations of the Wicked One? Yes; there was something in the crown of thorns truly royal after all. He was a King of men that wore it—a King of men,—One of a spirit truly king-like, and the nobleness of which was never more conspicuous than in that hour of blood.

Can we dwell on these things without experiencing a profound feeling of humiliation? How little we have done for Him who would not spare Himself one pang of His great anguish in bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows! And how sadly little there is in us of the noble nature which led Him to endure it! Many things were possible to Christ which are impossible to us. But there are things, too, which are easy to us, though they were impossible to Him. How easy do we find it to neglect the work which God has given us to do! Christ could not look from heaven upon a world lying in



wickedness without coming forth from the glory which He had at God's right hand, to take part in its sorrow and its wretchedness, that through Him it might be saved; but how easy do we find it to live in the very midst of sin and misery without experiencing any such impulse, or at least without feeling it in more than the slightest degree! How easy to content ourselves with a mere sentimental lamentation over the evil that is around us! How easy to refrain from practical exertion to abate it! Is not this to our shame? Is it not to our shame that the sacrifices we are willing to make for one another are so few and so grudged?

Let us stir up our hearts. Let us pray God to give us more of Christ's spirit. We should not only be better men for it, but we should be happier too. Yes, we should be happier than we are if we bore the griefs of one another more than we do. It may look a paradox, but we know it is true. Were we pained more than we are by the sight of vice and wretchedness—were it a greater grief to us than it is to see the ignorance and degradation that surround us—were we touched more deeply with that feeling of compassion which brought our Saviour from heaven to die for us all—were we thus partakers in the sufferings of Christ—is there

not something in our hearts which tells us that our real happiness would be increased? This is a paradox which has its evidence not only in the words of Scripture, but in our own breasts. "He that saveth his life shall lose it; but he that loseth his life for Christ's sake"—that is to say, in Christ's work—"the same shall find it." To save ourselves—to consult our own selfish ends, our own ease, our own pleasure—at the expense of charity and generosity, is not this to lose ourselves, to lose all that is most worth preserving? What is there so much worth preserving as genial sympathy and God-like loving-kindness? Is our money as much worth as our heart? Is carnal ease as much worth seeking, as a withered soul is worth praying and striving to be delivered from? Was Demas wiser than Paul? Were the Pharisees more noble than Christ?

Let us pray that God would bestow upon us the grace of His Holy Spirit, so that we may enter into Christ's feeling of impossibilities, and may be rendered, like Him, unable to know without performing our Father's will, or to close our hearts against the calls of love.

He is the happiest of men who has most room in his heart; and he most blessed who blesses most, even as God who blesses all is blessed above all.

## VI.

### THE GOOD OF GOING TO THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

ECCLESIASTES vii. 2—"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart."

THIS verse ought to be read in the light of the third chapter of this book. We are there told that there is a time for everything. "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven: a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." It is not intended that we should be always in the midst of scenes of distress, and it would not be good for us if we were. It is not intended; else why has God placed within us so many capacities, and around us so many opportunities and means of enjoyment? Why has He made the world so beautiful? Why has He given us friends and the capacity for friendship? And it would not be good for us. The moderate enjoyment of innocent pleasures is necessary towards both our physical and our spiritual health. There are many graces of character which

require for their cultivation and display a cheerful social intercourse with our fellow-creatures; and there are many temptations against which such intercourse is no unimportant safeguard. Nor is there any inconsistency between the disposition that can best enjoy the amenities of society, and that which can best enter into the griefs of the distressed. He who rejoices with them that rejoice, is not the one who is least likely to weep with them that weep. He who grasps your hand with a genuine cordiality when some good fortune has befallen you and the smile is on your face, will not be the slowest to grasp it with an equal warmth when there is sadness in your house and sorrow in your heart. As the same pool of clear water reflects alike the sun and the cloud, so the genial nature which, with ready Christian sympathy, rejoices in your joys as if they were its own, may be the best trusted to enter into your distresses too, and bear them with you.

But while it would not be good for us to be always in the midst of scenes of distress, it is not on that side practically that we are most disposed to err. It is on the other side. We are prone to shun the house of mourning, and to seek rather the house of mirth. We do not need to be reminded nearly so much that it would not be good for us to be in the

house of mourning always, as that it would be good for us to be in it often. That there is a time to laugh and a time to weep, is a saying we quote far more frequently to excuse ourselves for excessive indulgence in the gaieties of the world, than for excessive familiarity with its sadder and more sombre scenes.

It is good to visit the house of mourning, because we are there instructed, in a manner as impressive as it is calculated to be useful, what are the true realities of life—the things most to be avoided and the things most to be sought after—life's real evils and life's real blessings.

If you find there the spirit of discontent; if you find that those on whom the hand of the Lord has been laid are not acknowledging that hand, or are repining under it; if you find there the spirit of querulousness, the spirit of complaint, the spirit of unbelief; if you find there the selfish spirit grieving with that sorrow of the world which worketh death,—how you are brought to see that the worst evil to man, that which gives venom to every sting, that which adds gall to every wound, that which infuses a double portion of wormwood into every bitter cup, is the alienation of the human child from the Divine Father! This is life's real evil.

And then its real blessings,—how we mistake often

in regard to these! how we fancy them to be its gaiety and grandeur, the pleasures of sense, the secular rewards of industry or ambition! We may know better. We do know better. We know that the real and enduring blessings of life are not the outward things so often eagerly coveted; but those inward possessions of faith, and hope, and charity which are immortal as the soul. This we know. We know it well. But how continually we are falling back into the old mistake, drawn by a worldly-mindedness that overpowers our reason and our convictions! There is nothing better fitted to correct this tendency than the habit of going from time to time to the house of mourning. A thoughtful visit to a sick-bed, or to a house in which there has been recent death, is worth a hundred homilies on the emptiness of earthly things. To him who is lying there, silent and still, dressed for the grave, what now are the realities? That busy world in which he toiled and struggled for so many years; that mansion which he built, and adorned, and fitted with every luxury, but into which his feet shall no more enter; that place of business where he was seen so regularly, but shall never be seen again;—what are the realities now—these, or the things of eternity?

And then, at the same time that one is taught by such scenes, in a very practical and home-speaking way, the solemn lesson of the emptiness of the world, one sometimes learns too, upon the other hand, how inestimably great is the value of religion.

If ever one feels vividly and realises clearly that the knowledge of God as our reconciled Father is, in no rhetorical exaggeration, in no mere common-place of pulpit oratory, but in actual, earnest truth, "the one thing needful" for us all, it is in the house of mourning, it is in the presence of distress, it is when a fellow-creature is going through the last dark valley. It is there one sees the preciousness of His companionship whose rod and staff comfort His people. I will draw no picture of death-bed raptures. It has not been my lot often to hear rapturous expressions from the lips of the dying. I do not think that rapturous expressions on the lips of dying Christians are so common as tracts and sermons sometimes represent them; at least to hear them has not often fallen to me. But I *have* heard the calm, humble, thankful utterances of a calm, and reverent, and peaceful faith, which was filling the heart even in the last extremity, though not with rapture, yet with a quiet joy that was truly "unspeakable and full

of glory." I *have* seen the aged believer, when nature was failing, and the time of his departure was at hand, waiting the Lord's will (as in good old phrase he would himself express it) with a cheerful, unpretending, yet unfearing confidence most beautiful to look upon, like the ripe corn waiting to be gathered on a still and sunny autumn day. I *have* seen younger sufferers, to whom the world had all the promise it ever seems to have to youthful eyes; I have seen them smitten by that lingering and treacherous malady which, by a slow decay, consigns so many to an early tomb; I have seen the consciousness dawning upon them more and more distinctly that their days upon the earth were numbered; I have seen there was a struggle at first ere they could resign themselves to the appointment of God; I have seen them victorious in that struggle, made so by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; I have seen them at length perfectly resigned, quietly and gently sinking to their rest, till they fell asleep in Jesus. In the view of scenes like these one learns to pray very earnestly for the production within himself of a like mind.

Again, it is good to go to the house of mourning, because by that means our Christian sympathies are exercised and developed.



And this, in every point of view in which it can be looked at, is an object of the highest importance. Nothing is of greater Christian consequence than to possess a vivid realising sense of the love of Christ to us; and towards this end nothing is a better help than the cultivation of love to the brethren. If we are of dull and slow sympathy, how can hearts thus cold appreciate with any clearness the wonderful loving-kindness of our Redeemer? How can they understand it, having so little in themselves of that which resembles it? All sentiments are best understood in the way of fellow-feeling, and he will best understand Christ who has fellow-feeling with Christ in the great love wherewith He loved us all. Thus, in an important way, the homes of the sorrowful, to which we resort, are schools of the highest theology. Besides, it is at once our highest honour and our truest felicity to have the spirit of Christ dwelling in us, and to be fellow-workers together with Him. There are few enjoyments in this world to be compared with the enjoyment of making others happy. There are few pleasures so great as to be hailed with a smile in the house of the widow and the fatherless,—to be welcomed, as if we carried sunlight with us, in the homes on which the world does not shine.

There is something in this of the very blessedness of Him whose mission it was to bind up the broken-hearted.

And let us remember that if we wish to cultivate our Christian sympathies to any good extent, we must do so in a practical manner. Christ's sympathy was practical. It showed itself in deeds. And all such sympathy as will not show itself in deeds is nearer perhaps hypocrisy than charity. In the best case it is a form of self-deception. Is the sensibility much worth that can be touched by the pictures of suffering in a tragedy, or a novel, or a pathetic sermon, but which grudges an hour or a shilling to the active work of Christian beneficence? The cultivation of such sensibility only hardens the heart.

Let me add that it is good to visit the house of mourning, because in doing so one is led, so to speak, into the heart of Christianity.

We occupy ourselves a great deal with what may be called the superficials and accessories of Christianity—questions as to its evidence, discussions as to the meaning of obscure texts, arguments touching the harmony of its doctrines, theories about the Divine purposes, and the like. When a man is well, and has time for thought, these are very

proper subjects on which to exercise his faculties. But there is a deeper heart of Christianity, which in the handling of these questions we may not sufficiently value, but with which we are forced into contact by visiting the poor and the afflicted. We go to the house of the widow and the fatherless, or to the bedside of the sick or dying; and what are we to say there? What are we to tell our suffering fellow-creatures for their consolation in these straits? What words are we to speak? We feel there that our theories and discussions are not the heart of Christianity after all—are not what we should think for a moment of offering to this sorrowful sister or this dying brother as the rock of support to her or to him. We feel that for her or for him there must be something simpler, yet deeper and firmer, just as, we begin to think (and the lesson is precious), there must be something simpler and deeper for ourselves also, else our Christianity will stand us ill in stead when the time of our necessity arrives. One may have so much confidence in his own views on certain high and mysterious points, and so strong a persuasion of their especial Christian importance, that he is almost prepared to say, that those who differ from him in these views and opinions are hardly en-

titled to the Christian name at all. It should shake that persuasion when one finds that the points he magnifies so greatly are points he would never think of putting,—nay, would feel it almost cruelty to put,—points which become small and are forgotten in the presence of any great human sorrow. Perhaps our neighbour whom we so rashly judged may have the same anchorage with ourselves after all; for the anchorage ground of the soul is deeper than the controversies which agitate the surface of theology, away down in that grand and simple truth of the Fatherhood of God in Christ, to which, by a faith that descends through all the surface waves, the hearts of men whose opinions differ in many things may equally attach themselves. That is the grand and simple truth we feel we must present in the house of mourning. What else can we dwell upon but just that? And it is because we are driven to that as the only thing we can say, that I have made the observation that by visits to the house of mourning we are led into the heart of Christianity—for *that* is the heart of Christianity—not our theories, but *that*—that broad and simple truth. It is well to prosecute as deeply as we can the study of the ways, and the will, and the word of God; it is well to search deeply into everything connected with

the revelation He has given us; but I know nothing of greater importance than to take good heed that in Christianity we lose not sight of Christ, and in Scriptural studies we lose not sight of God, but keep our faith fresh in the simple elements of the gospel; towards all which I know no better means than the teaching of the ignorant and the visiting of the distressed. This practical use of Christianity will go far to save us from the danger of moving altogether in a cloud-land of our own, and mistaking the vapoury masses for God's solid world. It will ever and anon send us back to our rudiments, and make us see that the same truths are good for men which we may sometimes proudly think are only for children; that the deepest wisdom is in the simplicity of faith, and the only rest in the bosom of Jesus.

## VII.

### SINS OF OMISSION.

LUKE x. 30, 31—"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side."

AND if he had died would the priest have been innocent? He struck him no blow, but if he had died, would the priest have been innocent? There cannot be a moment's hesitation about the answer. In turning a deaf ear to the calls of humanity, and leaving the wounded traveller to lie there uncared for, as a good man would hardly have left even a wounded dog, the priest was not only guilty of a disgraceful piece of hard-heartedness, but, if the traveller had died, he would clearly, in the eye of justice, have been one of his murderers. The law, indeed, could not have touched him;—I mean the law of the country. He could not have been prosecuted for the murder at the bar of a criminal court.

But those feelings of the heart which reveal to us a higher law than that of criminal courts tell us at once that the priest was as bad as the thieves,—nay, truly, considering his office, a great deal worse. Here is a case, then, in which we can clearly see that the omission of a duty may be quite as bad as the commission of a crime,—nay, may be deeper in guilt, and blacker in shame.

I desire to take occasion from this case to make a few remarks on the subject of sins of omission.

And, first, let us remember that omissions of duty *are* sins. I say, let us *remember* this. There is no need to prove it. We know it well. But let us remember it distinctly.

There is a great deal of self-complacent satisfaction with their own religious condition on the part of many whose religion is little better than a name. This self-complacent satisfaction is a most pernicious evil and root of evils. It prevents men from seeing that they really stand in need of a Saviour, and therefore from truly and thankfully and lovingly accepting and obeying the Saviour who has been provided for them. It prevents them from setting a real and not a nominal value upon the gospel. It prevents them, too, from pressing forward in the Divine life with that persevering zeal

which can hardly exist apart from humility. Now it seems to me that one cause of this pernicious evil lies here:—people do not remember distinctly that omissions of duty are sins no less than transgressions are. There are other causes; but this, I think, is one. They say to themselves, ‘We have never done anything flagrantly bad; we have never been profane swearers or scoffers; we have never been addicted to licentious practices; we have never seduced the innocent; there are no such dark blots on the page of our story; on the whole, we have led decent, quiet lives:’—so people say to themselves, and take credit for being good Christians, though, perhaps, as to positive Christian feeling and action, as to positive piety towards God and love to Christ, they are utterly, or all but utterly, dead.

Now let us consider. We have never done anything flagrantly bad;—so far well;—but have we ever done anything particularly good? We have never been profane scoffers;—but have we been men of prayer? We have never seduced the innocent;—but have we sought to reclaim the vicious? It cannot be said of us, as was said of the prodigal, that we have wasted our substance with riotous living;—but have we sought to use it as stewards of the grace of God? We have not been profligates;—but have we



been actively pious and beneficent? We have not been high-handed sinners;—but have we been decided and devoted disciples?

It is to be borne in mind that we are not merely forbidden to do the works of the devil; we are called upon to abound in the works of the Lord. In the field which He has cultivated and sown God desires something more than the absence of weeds; He desires a crop of useful grain. In the vineyard which He has planted He looks for a vintage of grapes. He desires something more at the hands of Christian people than merely a quiet life; He wants energetic and active and self-sacrificing service. He wants something more than negatives; something more than a drowsy decency, a sleepy inoffensiveness;—He wants work, positive work, at the hands of His people, springing from love, positive love, in their hearts. Have *we* loved, and have *we* worked? Are we loving, and are we working?

And let us remember not only that omissions of duty are sins, but that they may very possibly be, and often, in point of fact, actually are, sins of a high degree of heinousness.

It has been already observed that omissions of duty are frequently tantamount to transgressions. There are many cases in which not to do a thing is tanta-

mount to doing its opposite. If I see a person drowning in the water whom I could save by stretching out my hand, and if I will not stretch out my hand, am I not guilty of his death? And just thus, if there are neighbours round me whom I might succour spiritually or temporally, but whose case I will not look at, where is my excuse?

The same thing is equally evident as regards the duties a man owes to himself. Each of us owes to himself, above and before all other things, the care of his own soul. And the care of one's soul implies the use of God's word and ordinances, earnestness in prayer, and other similar duties. To omit these duties is manifestly to sin against our own lives. It is the same thing as if we consciously and purposely gave ourselves up to the dominion of ungodliness. To go into the world and meet its trials and temptations, without having first attended to those spiritual exercises which are designed and fitted by our gracious Father to strengthen us for meeting them, is to go into the battle without putting on our armour; or, in other words, to court death.

And yet again, what is thus true in regard to the duties we owe to our fellow-creatures and to ourselves, is true, in like manner, in regard to those we

owe more immediately and directly to God. Our duty to God is to love Him with all our heart and soul and strength and mind; and just *not* to love Him is the very root and essence of all sin.

So then omissions of duty are, in many cases, quite equivalent to transgressions of the law. But besides, consider what a debased state of mind, what coldness and hardness of heart, habitual and wilful omissions indicate. To hear God calling us to this or that duty; to acknowledge that He is calling us; and yet to sit still, to refuse to listen to Him, to suffer our love of ease to overrule our sense of obligation,—what can be worse? What a poor appreciation it shows of the claims which our Creator and Preserver has upon us! What small value it indicates that we are setting upon that great price wherewith He has bought us to Himself! How faint it shews our gratitude to be! How hard it proves us, and how callous! Your decent, dead, nominal Christians, who boast so much of sitting under their own vine and their own fig-tree, none daring to make them afraid,—is there not something to be afraid of in that very inertness of mind which permits them to sit so indolently, doing nothing to cultivate the vineyard?

In addition to all this, sins of omission are

peculiarly dangerous. They are so for this reason;—the habit of neglect is one which is peculiarly apt to grow. The conscience more readily overlooks omissions than it does transgressions, and on that account the habit is more apt to steal upon us, and master us before we are aware. As we have seen already, not to do what is right is often as bad as to do what is wrong; but somehow we do not discern the evil so directly and immediately in the one case as in the other. A little reflection reveals it; but we do not discern it so directly and immediately. We can remain quietly in indolence—quietly and self-complacently,—when our conscience would speak out were we going astray. Non-activity in good does not present itself to our thoughts as sinful with the same vividness and force with which activity in evil does so. You would not positively teach your neighbour an evil lesson—your conscience would not let you do *that*; but, without much compunction, you can suffer him to remain in evil and darkness when you might, if you pleased, do something to deliver him from them. The priest would not have struck the traveller a blow, nor have taken his purse or his raiment; but he could let him lie and die by the roadside. Many a man would not, for the world,

cheat his neighbour to the extent of even a single farthing;—but yet he can withhold charity,—*that* does not seem so great a sin. You would not scoff;—no;—but you may omit worship. You would not mock at sacred things;—no;—but you may spend days and weeks without bestowing a serious thought upon them. Now, just because the wrongness of such omissions does not strike the conscience so forcibly, the peril arising from them is all the greater. They are sins which are all the more dangerous, because they can be persevered in with fewer checks. For, beyond doubt, less though we may feel their heinousness, they are just as able to destroy the soul as any other kind of sins whatever. One can destroy his soul very effectually just by taking no means to save it. There are enough of evil influences in the world to work its destruction very thoroughly if one just takes no precautions against them. It only needs negligence, and the weeds will grow fast enough in the soil of the human heart. It only needs that we go to sleep, and the enemy will sow the tares.

The children of Israel, when encamped at the foot of Sinai, were told that no one must pass the barrier which was set around the Mount, else he would be thrust through. This might be taken as a

type of the punishment of transgression. But go back in their history a little farther. Go back to the memorable night of the first passover, when they were told to sprinkle blood upon their lintels and door-posts, and the destroying angel, who was to smite the first-born in every household of Egypt, would pass their houses over, and leave them, and their children, and their cattle, in safety. Suppose that any one had omitted to sprinkle the blood upon his lintel and his door-posts, would not omission have been as fatal upon this occasion as transgression upon the other? Depend upon it, no man can take a more certain plan to bring destruction upon his own soul than just to do nothing to insure its salvation. Just go quietly to bed without the blood upon the door-posts, and, in point of fact, you are simply inviting the angel of death.

So, then, let us consider these things, and, though it is matter of thankfulness if we have been kept back by God's restraining grace from flagrant wickedness of a positive and open kind, let us not be content with a Christian profession which is unaccompanied with zeal for God, the use of God's ordinances, and such amount of Christian work as may fall within our opportunities.

## VIII.

### CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE.

1 CORINTHIANS iii. 21, 22, 23—"All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

THERE is then a possibility of gaining the whole world and yet not losing one's own soul. Nay, it is only through the care of the soul that the world can be gained in any true sense. For it was only in so far as the brethren at Corinth were sincere followers of the Lord Jesus, seeking through Him to live to God, that St. Paul could say to them, as he has done, "All things are yours."

It is hardly necessary to explain that the sense in which the Apostle here speaks of the Christian's property in all things is a moral one. They are his, because, under the blessing and according to the plan of God, they may be, and are intended to be, conducive to the highest interests of his spiritual life. Of those whose affections are centred on the things of time,

one might far more truly say that they belong to the world, than that it belongs to them. For they are the slaves of their own possessions, whom these possessions rule, and in whom they crush down with cruel hand whatever is best and worthiest, whatever is generous and divine. It is when one can use, and habitually seeks to use, God's earthly gifts and dispensations towards those nobler and more permanent than earthly objects for which God designs them, that he is truly the master of his own circumstances, able, by that help which he enjoys from above, to compel good out of them all.

In a similar sense, not the world only, and life, and things present, but death also, and things to come, are the property of him who is joint-heir with Christ of the great inheritance provided for God's children. Death is his; for, through the hope which his Saviour enables him to cherish, he learns to regard it no longer as an enemy from whom there is no escape, but as a messenger of peace sent to convey him home. And things to come,—the glories which are at God's right hand for evermore,—are his also. The Apostle does not say they *will* be his, but they are his *now*. Too many of us are living at such a distance from God that we are unable fully to realise this part of



our possession; but if we would only allow to faith its perfect work, and accept the Divine offers and promises as freely as they are made, we should feel such present interest in the future world as to make it in a measure ours already. It was his already, when, in the confidence of that great faith he was enabled to exercise, the Apostle said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." The "things to come" were to him a present blessing and a present joy, when, in the comfort of this assurance, he rejoiced in tribulation, and took gladly all his sufferings for Christ's sake. Let us pray for the like precious faith, that we too may be able, through the same Redeemer, to lay hold of the hope of eternal life, and to rejoice in it always.

But we have not yet noticed our chief privilege of all. The words we have placed at the head of this paper are often quoted incorrectly, as if the Apostle had said, "All things are yours, *for* ye are Christ's;" whereas what he does say is, "*and* ye are Christ's." He means, it is often thought, that it is because we belong to Christ that all things are ours; that our being Christ's property is our security that all things shall be turned to our good. Christ has

been exalted to be Head over all things, and therefore they who are His have an interest in all things. Now, this is no doubt true, and it is truth of the most valuable kind; but it is not the truth which the Apostle states in this passage. We miss by such an interpretation a very beautiful and impressive idea. Let us look again at the Apostle's words exactly as they stand. "All things are yours, *and ye are Christ's:*" that is to say, *our being Christ's is itself part of our privilege.* That we are His property is itself to be counted among the blessings we enjoy. It is not simply that we have our blessings because we are His property, but to be His property is itself our blessing. We are not our own, but His; and to be His is itself part of our high vocation.

There is a frequent misconception with respect to the nature of redemption to which we may here advert. It would seem to be often thought that the good we are to get from Christ's work is, that He will bestow certain things upon us, which, by His sufferings and death, He has bought for that purpose. But this is not the way in which we ought to look at the subject,—at least it is not the truest nor the highest way. The way to look at it is,—Christ has bought, by His sufferings and death, not

certain things to give us, but *us ourselves*, that He might give us to God. He has “redeemed us with His blood”—redeemed *us*—redeemed us from the power of the enemy, that we may not belong to the enemy any longer, but may hereafter belong to our rightful Lord. And this, if we will only think of it, is the blessing of blessings—the highest good we could receive. Not to be our own, but God’s, is the greatest honour and the noblest privilege. We were created to be His, and the fountain of all misery is to deny the nature thus bestowed on us at first; while, on the other hand, to live according to that nature, as His faithful children and servants, is the source of all purest blessedness. Pardon a plain illustration; but suppose that any of us had been made a slave, as it sometimes happened, for example, in former days, that countrymen of our own were made slaves by Algerian pirates. In such a case it would have been a small matter for any one to have purchased things to give us so long as we continued in slavery. We should have cared but little for the greatest luxuries with which any one could have furnished us. The great thing would have been to have paid our ransom—to have bought *ourselves*—to have redeemed *us*, and restored us to our native land. Just thus it is the greatest of

blessings—the all-inclusive blessing—the essential condition of every other real blessing—a thing without which nothing else can be a blessing at all in any genuine sense;—that we should ourselves be redeemed and restored to our natural condition as God's property, and not the devil's; God's servants, and not the slaves of the enemy.

I wish I were able to say strongly enough what a great blessing it is to belong to God, and to feel that we belong to Him. It is from the throwing off of our dependent character, and from the indulgence of self-will and self-seeking that all the worst evils of our condition arise. And the very first thing to bring us back to true happiness is just to return to our dependence, to come back to God, and submit our wills to His will, and take it for our principle to live, not to ourselves, but to Him. 'Not my own, but Thine,—Thine, O Thou who hast redeemed me,—Thine, to perform Thy will as, 'doubtless, Thou wilt give me strength,—Thine, to be 'dealt with as it pleaseth Thee,—Thine, that I may 'neither live to myself nor die to myself, but may 'live and die to Thy glory:'—this is the secret of true and unchangeable peace; the secret, too, of the noblest energy for work, as well as of the most devout fortitude under affliction; this is the senti-

ment which is strongest of all that are conceivable to make brave, and patient, and high-souled workers and endurers in the world. We should be approaching nearer and nearer to a very deep and heavenly happiness if we were daily exercising ourselves in a closer sympathy with the spirit of the prayer of Thomas à Kempis: "O Lord, who knowest what is best, let this or that be done as Thou shalt please; give what Thou wilt, and how much Thou wilt, and when Thou wilt; set me where Thou wilt, and deal with me in all things just as Thou wilt; for I am Thy servant prepared for all things, and I desire to live not unto myself, but unto Thee; and O that I could do it worthily and perfectly; grant me above all things that can be desired to have my heart at one with Thee, for Thou art the only rest, and in Thee only is there peace to my soul."

We come now to the Apostle's climax: "Christ is God's." We have anticipated much that might be said on this grand article of Christian privilege; for indeed it is not easy to keep separate our being Christ's, and His and our together being God's. Nor truly is it necessary, for He has Himself said, "All mine are thine, and thine are mine," and again, "I pray for them, that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee; that they

also may be one in us." To belong to Christ is therefore also to belong to God, and we cannot separate between the two, so as to speak quite apart of the one and of the other. Nevertheless, while this is so, there is a grand and sublime truth in the Apostle's words of which we must not lose sight, and which most aptly and impressively sums up his catalogue of Christian privilege. "Christ is God's." It was an idea very near the Apostle's heart that Christ and His church are one,—Christ the Head, His church the members,—and the Head and the members together one body appointed unto God's glory. Christ in the church, therefore, and the church in Him,—or rather the one body of Christ and the church together,—is God's possession; and every faithful Christian is a treasure He values and will preserve safe, as belonging to the completeness of the body of His Son. One is almost overwhelmed when one attempts to rise to the grandeur of this conception of our Christian position; but it only answers to the plain words of Scripture. And surely, by God's grace, it ought to induce us to aim, with a profound earnestness, at a high and spiritual tone of living. If we belong to God as part of the body of Christ, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!

## IX.

### SPECIAL PRIVILEGE.

MARK v. 37—"And He suffered no man to follow Him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James."

ON three occasions these disciples were admitted to special privilege,—at the house of Jairus, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in the garden of Gethsemane. At Jairus' house they were admitted to see the great miracle which our Lord there performed; on the Mount of Transfiguration they were allowed to be near Him when He laid aside for a time the veil of His humiliation and assumed the glory with which He is now for ever invested at the right hand of God; in Gethsemane they were suffered to behold more than the rest of the great sorrow wherewith His soul was exceeding sorrowful. On all these occasions they were admitted to witness scenes which were among the most remarkable and significant in our Saviour's life, and from which the other disciples were excluded.

The remark I mean to base on this is not a new one; on the contrary, it is very old. It was made by one of the earliest fathers\* of the Christian church. "There were thus," he says, "certain disciples, who, so to speak, were 'more elect than the elect,' or formed an election within the election." Out of the body of His followers our Lord chose twelve to be His more intimate companions and friends; but out of these twelve He chose three to be with Him on certain occasions of peculiar importance, their presence on which might well be regarded as a privilege of a very special and exalted description.

Is there anything like this at the present day—anything which might be described in similar terms? Need I say there plainly is? It is true that all sincere Christians stand on the same level in some respects. They have, for example, the pardon of their sins through the merits and mediation of our blessed Lord, and they are partakers in the adoption which is through Him. But while this is the case, there are, at the same time, very wide differences among them in respect of the fulness of their Christian apprehension, the depth of their Christian insight, the abundance of their Christian comfort. Some are babes in Christ, and some are men. Some

\* Clement of Alexandria.



stand on the threshold only of the temple, getting but dim and transient glimpses of the glory that is within; others, advancing into the holy place, are gladdened by a clearer view of the majesty and love that are resplendent in the reconciled face of the great God, even our Saviour. There is an election of the whole church; it is chosen out of the world to receive and enjoy the common blessings of the gospel: but there is thus also an election within the church, some of its members attaining to higher things than their brethren, to a richer share of the great heritage of the children of God.

I have no desire to make any fanciful use of the events of our Lord's history, nor to seek in them for lessons they do not really convey. They are far too solemn and important to be dealt with in any spirit of ingenious trifling. But I think it is no fancy to say that the particular instances of the Lord's favour shewn to the three most privileged disciples may be taken as indications, or illustrations, of what the highest Christian privileges are. They were admitted to see,—in Jairus' house, the power;—on the Mount, the glory;—in the Garden, the sorrow of Christ;—and to obtain peculiarly clear and realising views of these three things has been in all ages, and is, and must be, the Lord's best gift to those

whom He most loves, and who live nearest to Him. If one were to ask himself what he might best pray for as the thing that would tend most to increase his Christian comfort, to enliven his Christian hope, and stimulate his Christian energy, I know not what he might rather supplicate than to share in the privileges of the three disciples. ‘Grant me, O ‘Lord, what Thou didst grant of old to Peter, and ‘James, and John. Shew me the fulness of Thy beneficent power, as Thou didst shew it to them in the ‘house at Capernaum, that thus I may be established ‘in perfect confidence that Thou both canst and wilt ‘bestow on me, Thy servant, both now spiritually ‘and hereafter eternally, life from the dead. Make ‘manifest also to the eye of my faith that glory which ‘Thou didst wear for a little on the Mount of Trans- ‘figuration and now wearest for ever in the heavens, ‘that I may heartily acknowledge Thee as the glori- ‘ous Son of God, Head over all things to Thy church, ‘and may yield to Thee and trust in Thee as my ‘rightful Lord and mighty Protector. And from ‘Tabor and Capernaum let me go with Thee like- ‘wise to the scene of Thine agony; let me bear ‘Thee company among the olives of Gethsemane; ‘let me see Thee with the bloody sweat upon Thy ‘patient brow; grant me some view of Thy great

‘anguish when Thou didst give Thy soul an offering for sin, that I may know and in some measure comprehend the riches of Thy love, and so may be filled with all the fulness of God.’

And now, why was it that Peter, James, and John were selected to enjoy the privileges of which we have been speaking? We may learn something from attending for a moment to this question.

Of course no man can be said to *deserve* any Christian privilege at all. It is of mercy only that any one enjoys any of the blessings of the gospel; and the grace of Christ is so utterly independent of any antecedent worthiness on the part of man, that it is offered to the vilest and the guiltiest. We are speaking, however, at present, not about the grounds of gospel invitations, but about those on which some are admitted to higher Christian benefits, or to a higher degree of the enjoyment of them than others are. And in this regard there is nothing inconsistent with the freeness of the gospel, but there may be, on the contrary, a valuable incentive to holy living, in the remark that it may depend on personal reasons, such as our degree of fidelity, of zeal, or of love, in what measure we shall attain these higher things. It seems evident that we must look to the personal qualities of Peter, James, and John, for the

reason which led to their selection from among the twelve to receive those peculiar favours which, as we have seen, our Lord bestowed upon them.

As to Peter. We can easily understand that our Lord should have cherished a warm affection towards that Apostle. No doubt he committed great faults. Not one of the twelve, except Judas, committed greater. Yet still there was something loveable about him. Singularly honest and open; no calculator; an impulsive man; of wonderfully warm feelings; and like a boy in his entire freedom from all double-mindedness; mistaken often, but always sincere, true, and genuine; there was something about him so human and natural, so real and unaffected, so well-meaning and hearty, that we cannot help being drawn to him, and though sometimes angry with him, our anger is always mingled with pity and a certain irresistible sense of liking.— Since Peter was one of the most privileged three, we may infer, I think, that the Lord bestows His best gifts on the truthful and the single-hearted, those who stand out among their brethren for simplicity of character and energy of zeal.

As to John. We associate with John the idea of love. And no man ever received such a testimony as he did to the tenderness of his nature. It

was to him that our Lord, when on the cross, entrusted the care of His mother, saying, "Woman, behold thy son!" thus putting him in His own place, doubtless as being the one of all the twelve who could best fill it. The same Apostle has left to the Church a Gospel, three Epistles, and the Book of Revelation; and what wonderful productions they all are! No portions of the Bible are more profound in doctrine or more touching in expression, and all of them breathe throughout a certain beautiful refinement, and shew an insight into the things of God to which no writer could attain, and in which no reader can partake, except through the indwelling of that spirit of love which is the most God-like of all things in the human soul.—When we find the name of John among the favoured three, we are taught that a tender, loving heart may hope to be filled with blessing.

As to James. Of James we know but very little. We know that he was put to death by Herod ere yet he had time to do much in the work of the apostleship. So we learn from the Book of Acts. And this is almost all we know about him. The James who was taken by our Lord to Jairus' house, and Tabor, and Gethsemane, was not the same with the James who presided at the council of

Jerusalem, and took an active part in the affairs of the Church for a long time; nor was it he who wrote the epistle. We know nothing about him, therefore, from his writings as we do about John; nor almost anything from any other source. I rejoice to find, among the three disciples who received special tokens of our Lord's confidence and favour, one whose name is hardly known to history and who died early; one whose character there is no material for drawing. Sometimes I like to wander in an old churchyard and spell out, on the worn, moss-grown stones, the half-illegible memorials of men who, while they lived, were known only to a few neighbours, and whose names are now forgotten under the sun. I rejoice to reflect that, as James was among the three, so, among forgotten men of the past, and unknown men of the present who shall be forgotten soon, there may have been, and may be, not a few who, in the faithful service and the near fellowship of our gracious Redeemer, have enjoyed and are enjoying a fulness of privilege, of saving knowledge and of Christian comfort, prophetic of the heaven into which they shall be gathered in due time by that Lord whose promises have this seal, "The Lord knoweth them that are His."

## X.

### CHRISTIAN SELF-RESPECT.

EPHESIANS iv. 1—"I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness."

IT is desirable, in speaking on religious subjects, to avoid extravagant language, and to speak, as far as one can, without any of that exaggeration which only weakens arguments in the view of thoughtful minds. But what language is there which any one could employ that would be too strong to describe the highness of that vocation wherewith we are called as Christians? The expressions of Scripture on the subject are such that if one had devised them out of his own mind, and used them of his own authority, he might have been thought bold almost to the verge of profaneness. To quote only one passage, what a wonderful saying is that of the Apostle John,—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

“Now are we the sons of God”—this as to our

present position. And we are to take the words without reservation. We are not to empty them of meaning by treating them as figurative language merely, but we are to take them as they stand. The whole gospel is just one grand declaration and assurance, that in a true sense we are the children of God—made after His own image—whom He loves with a Father's love—whom He grieves for when they are disobedient and unhappy—and whom He longs to see returning from their estrangement, and seeking and receiving in Christ all the privileges and all the heritage of sons.

And then as to our future prospects:—what shall I say? How can I say anything worthy of the subject? I am warned by the words of Scripture that I cannot, and need not try. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." No man yet knows it. No man can conceive it. In the day-time we cannot see the glories of the firmament. It is when night comes that we see the stars. So, in this life we cannot understand with any fulness the glory that is prepared for them that love God. Night will reveal it. We shall know it when we die. Then, but not sooner, we shall know it fully.

If such is our position and such our prospects, what a high life we should feel ourselves constrained



to lead! Is it for them who are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ to take for their portion those vanities and frivolities of the world, which are at once so unworthy of them, and so utterly insufficient, in and by themselves, to afford any real satisfaction? Shall he who is to dwell in the Heavenly Mansions be content to grovel amidst any pollution? Shall he who is himself (in the language of St Paul) the very "temple of the Holy Ghost," consent to desecrate that temple, by setting up within it any other god, or by any impiety or sacrilege whatever?

To say it briefly—I counsel Christian Self-respect;—not a high estimate of our own merit, but a thankful appreciation of that position to which, of mercy, we have been called,—not an exalted opinion of our own worthiness, but a proper sense of the great dignity to which, though unworthy, we have been raised,—not a conceited notion of our own claims, or of our own strength, but a high idea of that place to which, without any claim, we have been elevated, and which we can keep only through a lowly dependence upon the strength of God. For all this, Christian Self-respect is a short name, and this is the sense in which, when recommending it, I wish to be understood.

Self-respect is always a good thing. Self-assertion is generally a bad thing; self-conceit and self-confidence are always so. But self-respect is good. It keeps one up. When one loses it, one sinks. To say of a man that he has lost his self-respect, is to say in other words that he is on the way to destruction.

Now, I counsel Christian Self-respect. I wish to say that of all men a Christian, as such, ought to cherish a high regard for the position to which he has been called, and to feel himself under the strongest obligation to do nothing that would bring upon it any discredit; nay, not only to do nothing that would bring discredit upon it in the eyes of the world, but not even to harbour secretly any thought or wish for which his own conscience chides him, and which he feels to be unworthy of a heart in which the Lord has promised to take up His abode. In ordinary life people are kept from many evils by a sense of honour as gentlemen, of credit as men of business. Would that people of all ranks and professions carried about with them, more than they do, a sense of the honour and credit they are bound to maintain as brethren of our adorable Saviour, and joint-heirs with Him of the kingdom of heaven!

How much power for good there often is in the

feeling that we are associated with worthy companions! We know, for example, what influence the fame of their regiment often exercises on the minds of soldiers. They will do the boldest deeds in the most desperate circumstances; they will join the forlorn hope; they will go forward to almost certain death, that the colours may not be disgraced which have been carried in similar emergencies so often and so boldly before. Is there any extravagance in saying that a similar motive may well animate us as good soldiers of Jesus Christ? Do not we belong to a worthy company, seeing it contains the Patriarchs, and Prophets, and Apostles, and Martyrs, and all the great Servants of the Most High, who, through faith, have subdued kingdoms and wrought righteousness, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire; yes, and what perhaps comes nearer to our hearts, the humbler Servants also, whom we loved in the flesh, and who fought in patience their honourable, though it may be unknown, battle, and are now in peace among them who have overcome. Have not we a place, I ask, among a worthy company, and is it other than reasonable that this remembrance should be felt as a power to keep us from whatever is any way base or mean?

Or, again, regard for the honour of one's family:— we know what a powerful motive this likewise is. One would not wish to disgrace one's ancestors. A man of ancient and noble lineage is kept by that consideration from descending to what is mean and ungenerous; or, if he be not, we regard him with a pity that is not unmingled with indignation. Nor is it to nobles alone and persons of ancient pedigree that this applies; but the son of any honest man who has been respected in his day and generation, is little worth if he does not understand what influence for good there may be in such a memory. Now, only let us remember of what family it is that we form part as Christians. We are of the household of God, and have the Lord Jesus for our elder brother,—shall we willingly disgrace so sublime a relationship?

It remains to be observed that there is a wide difference between self-respect and pride. We know the difference in common life. It is the same in the more inward life of the soul. A Christian should respect his position, for it is a high one; yet not in the spirit of pride, for he owes it to mercy alone. If he has been admitted to God's feast, he owes the wedding garment altogether to God's alms. And then, besides, how far we come short of our position

in our conduct! The more we are alive to the highness of our vocation the more we shall feel *that*. And therefore it is not pride that becomes us, but a very deep humiliation. Thus there is nature in the words of the Apostle, who, when he has told us that we ought to walk worthy of our calling, adds in the same breath, "with all lowliness and meekness."

Yes, with all lowliness and meekness. In good truth, these dispositions become us well. Let us look back; and have we been living in the past worthy of our privileges? Let us look within; and are we so living at the present moment? Let us look forward; and is there any reasonable prospect, but that we shall continue to feel the power of our besetting sins and of the temptations of the world so as still to require much self-distrust, much vigilance, and much prayer? Truly it becomes us to walk with humility.

And, I repeat, we shall not be the less likely to do so because we cherish a high sense of our calling, and keep before our minds a lofty aim. That we are the creatures of a day whose breath is in our nostrils, and who are crushed before the moth—that we live in a fleeting, perishing world—that we are ourselves the subjects of much infirmity,—these, and such as these, are not the deepest utterances of a

humble spirit. Indeed, there may be in them no humility at all. No man was ever truly humble simply on the ground that men are subject to distress and weakness, and live to only threescore and ten. But when one has an object before him that is higher than himself, and towards which he is striving, but of which he is ever coming short through his own faults and mistakes—when he feels that he is living below his opportunities, and learns from his frequent falls how truly and how constantly he needs a strength higher than his own,—then is he humble; then there is something in his heart that works a genuine self-distrust, and tends to bring about in his habitual state of mind the same union of a high aim with a meek humility in the pursuit of it, the same association of an exalted estimate of his calling with a lowly estimate of his merit, which (so truthfully to nature) are brought before us by St Paul as in perfect harmony, and, indeed, in necessary connection with one another.

It is thus evident, that in thankfully acknowledging the goodness of God, who has called us in Christ to honour and glory and immortality, and in setting a high value upon this our vocation, we do not by any means bring upon ourselves the evil, or shut ourselves out from the blessing, of which we

are told in those many passages, where we are assured, to one purpose though in various words, that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." "The meek will He guide in judgment; the meek will He teach His way."

## XI.

### SELF-COMMAND.

PROVERBS xvi. 32—"He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city."

THE old Gnostics thought—at least certain of them thought—that there is something sinful in matter,—the matter of which the world is made—of which our bodies are made. I do not require to expose the fallacy of this. There cannot be sin in matter. It must be in mind that there is sin. There cannot be sin except where there is will—except where there is the power of disobedience. Matter, which is merely passive, cannot sin. There is no sin in the rocks and minerals which constitute the crust of the globe, nor in the mountains and the rivers which give variety to its scenery, nor in the grass and flowers by which it is so beautifully carpeted. As little is there any sin in the flesh and blood which form our bodies. It is corruptible flesh, no doubt, but corruptibility is one thing, and sin is another.



Being so frequently the instrument of sin, it may be called "sinful flesh" in that free use of language which we can perfectly understand; but the sinfulness really lies, not in the instrument, but in the soul which uses the instrument. All this will be at once admitted.

Perhaps, however, it may not be admitted equally at once, that, in themselves considered, our appetites and passions are not sinful. But a very little reflection will make this quite as evident as the other point. It is not in themselves, but in their inordinate and unruly exercise, that sin lies. There are some who would seem to imagine that there is an element of sinfulness in our natural affections, and desires, and propensities, viewed simply as such; and that therefore it belongs to Christian duty to crush them down and extinguish them, and, as it were, dehumanise ourselves, putting on moroseness, and austerity, and a gloomy asceticism, as different as can be from that genial, large-hearted, kindly cheerfulness which the Scriptures themselves always recommend. I say, as against this idea and its consequences, that our appetites and passions are not in themselves sinful, but that sinfulness lies in their inordinate and unruly exercise; and I say further, that a very little reflection will make this clear.

We are told in the fourth chapter of first Timothy that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thankfulness." This was written by St Paul against those who commanded to "abstain from meats;" who made a great deal, that is to say, of the old ceremonial distinctions between clean and unclean, and disputed about the propriety or impropriety of using as food meat that had been offered in sacrifice to idols. But the principle goes farther than the case which the Apostle had immediately before his mind. Not only the things round about us are the creatures of God, but the things within us are the creatures of God too. Our desires, and propensities, and appetites, and affections, are of God's implantation. And the Apostle's principle applies to them as much as to meats and drinks. They are good for their own uses, and when exercised in proper harmony the one with the other, and all in due subordination to reason and conscience. They are not in themselves necessarily and inevitably evil and injurious, but rather, when properly governed, conducive to the welfare and even needful to the existence of the human race.

Take, for example, the pleasures of the palate. It is no sin to be sensible of these in a moderate

degree; but when one falls under their dominion so much as to become a glutton or a drunkard, it is disgraceful and destructive.

Take the love of money. St Paul says that “the love of money is the root of all evil.” We know quite well what he means by this. We know quite well how true what he means is. It is quite as evident now and here in this mercantile country, and somewhat materialistic age, as it ever was in any country or at any time. Very great evils result from the inordinate love of money, or of wealth in one form or another. At the same time, it is perfectly evident that it is the inordinate love which the Apostle means. A certain portion, according to our stations, of that worldly substance of which money is the representative, it is absolutely necessary we should have; and a certain amount of prudential thought and care in the preservation and employment of it, it is our Christian duty to bestow;—even Christ and His disciples kept a bag and took care of that which was put therein. Nay more, it is quite right and proper that a man should use every fair and honest means, not only to obtain a livelihood, but to *better* his position, and that of his family, in temporal respects. This gives scope and exercise to many high qualities,—intelligence,

forethought, industry, enterprise, and various not unimportant forms of self-denial. The evil is when that which in moderation is thus necessary and beneficial becomes the engrossing passion of the soul, diverts its attention from the higher and imperishable treasures which are for eternity, parches up our feelings of charity towards our fellow-creatures, produces narrowness of heart, and keeps us creeping in the dust as the miserable slaves of that world in which we were appointed to exercise dominion.

Or, take self-love. Self-love, in that inordinate degree to which we give the name of selfishness, is often represented as the mother of all sin. And there is no little truth in the representation. Than a life of which the ruling principle is selfishness, there can be nothing more despicable. In every point of view, such a life is mean and unworthy; and there can be not only no nobleness, but no true virtue in it. It might be shewn, too, that an element of selfishness mingles with, and has a share in the production of, every species of immorality of which men are guilty. At the same time, looking calmly on the subject, and speaking in the interest not of declamation but of sense, there is a certain degree of self-regard which is right,—not only

natural, but right in itself, and warranted by even the most spiritual passages of Holy Scripture. We are told, for instance, that in order to follow Christ we must sacrifice ourselves; and we are told that we must do so, because he who saveth his life shall lose it, and he who loseth his life for Christ's sake shall find it. According to this passage, there is a certain self-regard which may be retained even in self-sacrifice, and by which self-sacrifice is not vitiated. In like manner, the rewards of a future state are often set forward in Scripture as inducements to patience and perseverance in holy living, and we are told even of our Lord Himself that, in bearing the cross and despising the shame, He looked forward to the joy that was set before Him. In short, according to the constitution God has given us, there is a degree of self-regard we cannot help exercising and being influenced by; and even if you try to picture and enforce the purest and most self-forgetting virtue,—however you may keep out of sight all that resembles material reward,—you will find yourself sliding unconsciously, but inevitably, into words and phrases which exhibit, among its chief recommendations, the nobleness and beauty which it gives to the character, and the peace of mind which results from the prac-

tice of it,—in valuing all which self-regard is implied. Here again, therefore, the sin lies in the inordinate working of a natural sentiment which in itself is not sinful. It is not that we have a regard to our own welfare, but that we make this, instead of devotion to the will of God, our first principle; it is not that we consider our own good, but that we make self our deity;—it is this which is the parent of so much evil.

One might go on with similar remarks to almost any length. Emulation, for example, is a good thing in its place. It is right we should be provoked by our neighbour's virtues to love and good works; but when emulation is not governed and balanced by brotherly-kindness, it is apt to degenerate into envy, than which there is none of the vices that is more unchristlike. Indignation against that which is evil we are warranted, and ought, to feel; but when this is not accompanied by those charitable sentiments which lead us to allow for the weakness of human nature and the strength of temptation, righteous anger may become ungodly wrath.

All this being so, we can easily understand why the wise King of Israel should have attached so great importance to the keeping of rule and order in one's

own heart. This, indeed, is of the very essence of virtue; and in a high sense there is nothing better in the world than a well-balanced mind,—a truly well-balanced mind,—not under the government of hard and severe intellect alone, but in which understanding is warmed by affection, and intelligence softened by kindness; nor yet, on the other hand, the subject of mere emotion and impulse, but in which impulse is directed by reason, and emotion guided by thought; the whole together, emotion and reason, intellect and feeling, understanding and desire, the executive faculties, so to speak, and the legislative faculties in the kingdom of the soul, being pervaded with the spirit of loyalty to our Divine Sovereign, and striving in harmony to accomplish His will and promote His glory.

In thus saying that the appetites, and affections, and propensities, and passions, which God has put in our hearts, are not in themselves sinful, but only their inordinate and inharmonious exercise,—and that therefore our duty is, not to dehumanise ourselves by killing, or seeking to kill, them out of us altogether, but rather to keep them in proper restraint,—I may have appeared to some, on the first glance, to have been propounding an easy and lax view of Christian obligation, not consistent with what we read in so

many places of the Scripture about the difficulty of the Christian life. But I should imagine it is only on the first glance that any one can entertain such an idea. For in real truth, and as every day's experience shews, there is nothing more hard than to direct and moderate our own inclinations and tendencies. There is nothing to which the Scripture figure of a warfare more accurately applies, than to the continual contest with ourselves which is necessary towards this end. Than the government of our own hearts, there is no dominion which is more the result of conquest.

In many cases it is much easier to abstain from a thing altogether than to use it moderately. For instance, if one has contracted the habit of indulging to excess in strong drink, the easiest thing for him is to abstain altogether. This is the easiest thing for him, and the thing he ought to do. You may say it is higher and nobler to resist a temptation than to flee from it. Very true; but this applies only when temptation meets us in the way of duty. In the case now instanced, no duty calls into temptation's way, and, as flight is easiest, therefore it is best. But one cannot avoid many sorts of temptations as one might avoid this. We cannot abstain, for example, from



working at our work that we and our dependents may be provided for; and yet this working at our work in the world may come to engross us so wholly, that we shall forget another world of far greater importance. We cannot, in this case, have the cure of abstinence; we can only have the cure of self-government. We cannot abstain from mingling in the society of our fellow-creatures; and yet in doing so our temper will be tried, our charity will be tried, our brotherly love will be tried in a thousand ways; we cannot shut ourselves up from seeing things which may rightly excite indignation, but may wrongly give rise to personal ill-will;—in instances like these there is no safeguard possible but the safeguard of self-restraint. A very little knowledge of ourselves is sufficient to shew how extremely difficult this self-restraint is; and on looking into our own hearts, I am sure we shall not at any rate *continue* to think, that, in assigning to it the great importance I have done in the foregoing observations, I have given too easy a description of human duty.

I have said little or nothing in the course of these remarks as to what are called (quite properly) the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. Nor shall I enter on that subject now. Only let it be observed

that it is precisely such views as have been stated that give meaning to the gospel, and tend to bring it home as really glad tidings of great joy. Just as we feel how great a thing it is to possess supremacy within our own breasts, and how hard a warfare is required in order to obtain it, do we also come to perceive, with realising vividness, how truly and urgently we stand in need of a Captain of our Salvation to fight for us, and how, in order to be masters of ourselves, we must call in the aid of One above ourselves; so that, therefore, there is a real and unspeakable blessing in the good news of God that we have such a Captain in Christ, and that He will give His Spirit to them that ask Him.

## XII.

### FIRMNESS.

JOHN xix. 22—"Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written."

WHEN our Lord was crucified there was a superscription put over the cross by order of Pilate,—“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The priests did not like this. They wished it changed, and applied to Pilate to have it changed. They wished it to run, not that He was the King of the Jews, but that He said He was. A poor case they must have felt they had had against Him, when they could not bear Him to be called their King, even though the cross proclaimed it such terrible irony. One would think, however, upon the whole, that the change was hardly worth either their asking or Pilate’s refusing.

But he did refuse. He answered and said, “What I have written, I have written.” This was his answer, and, probably enough, he felt a glow of satisfaction when he had given it. He may very

likely have felt, before, some not pleasant doubts whether he had acted with the firmness which became him as a judge, when he had yielded to the clamour of the Jews, and sentenced our Saviour to be crucified. But now,—no, he would not alter one letter of the superscription. There it was, and there it must remain. They did not like it, but no matter,—was he, the Governor, to be dictated to by these troublesome priests? No, truly; there the writing was; and they might clamour as they pleased, but no alteration would be permitted.

One could have wished that he had shewn this firmness sooner. But in truth it was not firmness at all. It was just that obstinacy about trifles which persons of weak character sometimes put on to atone to themselves, or apply a salve to their self-respect, when they have yielded, perhaps very sinfully and basely, in affairs of greater moment. It is very characteristic of a weak man to give up his ground in a matter of importance, and afterwards console himself by standing stubbornly upon some mere punctilio.

And certainly, if the unimportant thing to which reference has thus been made is a proof of Pilate's weakness, that great and atrocious crime for which his name is held in infamy shews, in the most im-

pressive way, to what consequences such weakness may lead. There is no reason to think that Pilate was a man without a conscience. It was not with his will that he sentenced our Lord to death. On the contrary, he was most anxious to avoid doing so. He was anxious for superstitious reasons; his wife had a dream which alarmed him. And there is no reason to think that he may not have felt compunctions of conscience also. He tried, we know, in various ways to save our Lord's life. He said publicly that he had not been able to find any fault in Him. Notwithstanding, when the priests urged His condemnation, he tried a compromise; he would scourge Him and let Him go. Then, when this also failed, remembering that He was a Galilean, he sent Him to appear before Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee, who happened to be in Jerusalem at the time, thus seeking to shift the responsibility from his own shoulders. Then, when again unsuccessful, he thought he would appeal to the people against the priests, and as it was the custom at that season to release a prisoner at the people's request, he would put it to them,—Barabbas or Jesus? Four several times he thus endeavoured to save himself the guilt and shame of passing the sentence. It would have been com-

paratively easy to have done so had he taken up a firm ground at once, and discharged our Lord from the bar the moment the accusations against Him were found to fail. He is lost when he suggests the compromise. From that moment he is in a false position. The priests have now the better of him. He can no longer act for himself. They are now his masters, and there is nothing for him but to comply with their desire. And not only so, but he cannot any longer oblige them gracefully. He must do their will; but they know he is doing it under a compulsion, and so, while he serves their purpose, he does not conciliate their favour and has forfeited their respect. In every view, he is wrong and unhappy. He commits the crime, yet recommends himself to no one. Most wretched man! in what a state of misery he must have been, when at length, vainly and childishly, he sent for water, and, washing his hands, as if thereby he could clear his conscience, took upon his soul the awful guilt of shedding the blood of the Saviour of the world!

May not I say, with all propriety, founding a Pastoral Counsel on this memorable instance, that it greatly concerns us all to cultivate firmness of mind? And I would say it specially to those who are

beginning life. How many are ruined in our own day by wanting the power to say No! How many are led, by a good-natured but fatal facility of disposition, to involve themselves in toils and snares from which they can afterwards find no escape!

It may appear to some that firmness is a gift of nature, which some men have and others want, just as some have, and some have not, a musical ear. This is so far true. Some are by nature of a more pliable constitution than others; some are more open than others to influence from without; some depend more than others on the opinion of those beside them, and are less capable of adhering with tenacity to their own course. All this is true. But at the same time it is no less true that cultivation can accomplish a great deal. To a large extent, firmness can be acquired. I still speak chiefly to those who are beginning life; and I say to them, make it a rule to act upon conscience at once; and when at any time you find you have failed, at once and frankly confess your sin to yourselves and to God. The practice of shewing reverence for conscience will, like any other practice, grow into a habit; and the habit of reverence for conscience is just another name for genuine firmness of mind.

There are persons who make conscience of trifles, in which they might yield, without either sin or shame, to the opinions or customs of those around them, and who pride themselves on their firmness, when they are merely ill-mannered, self-asserting, and disagreeable. It is for common sense and good feeling to avoid this. But whenever principle is really involved, it becomes every man to stand like a rock. In this way he at once performs his duty to his Maker, has the comfort of respecting himself, and rises in the esteem of his neighbours. Is it possible to imagine that Pilate would be more esteemed among the Jews because he pleased them at the expense of his conscience? Who ever rose permanently in the esteem of the public by truckling? It is conscientious principle, held boldly and firmly, and acted upon with decision, that always in the end, as well as generally in the meantime, commands respect and secures confidence.

Above all, the grand secret of genuine firmness is faith in God. There were some words spoken by Pilate in the course of his examination of our Lord, which, I think, throw light upon his whole character. Our Lord had said that He was come into the world to bear witness of the truth. Pilate asked, in reply, "What is truth?" I will not wait to inquire



whether this was said sneeringly or sadly. It shews, at least, his want of a belief; and his want of a belief and his want of moral courage had probably a close connection. We might notice another thing. We know that he was superstitious—a believer in dreams and the like. If he was also a sceptic, it were nothing but what has been often seen; for, strange though the alliance may appear, scepticism and superstition are frequently companions. Look, for example, at what is called the Spiritualism so much in fashion at the present day in some parts of America and elsewhere, and very often to be found in company with infidelity. But what we have now principally to observe is, that Pilate's want of a belief and want of resolution had, it is probable, a near relationship. If a man is without a belief, what is there to guide him? what is there to steady him? Only a superficial expediency, resting upon nothing. The great thing to give strength to character is faith: the having a principle, in which one believes steadfastly as a true principle, irrefragable and eternal; or rather, I should say,—for there is little strength comparatively in an abstract idea like that of a principle,—the having a God, the believing in a God who is righteous and wise, and will establish that which is

righteous, and bring all that is evil to shame. Belief in God, as revealed in His Son, is the deepest and most solid basis on which a strong and manly character can be built.

## XIII.

### CHRISTIAN COURTESY.

JOHN ii. 9—"The ruler of the feast tasted of the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was."

I NEED not rehearse the narrative to which these words belong. I have referred to them for the purpose of directing attention to the kind and delicate way in which, when He supplied the deficiency of wine at the marriage-feast, our Lord conferred this favour. He did not confer it ostentatiously, or so as to expose the poverty of the original entertainment. No one knew where the supply came from, except those who could not help knowing. The ruler of the feast tasted the wine, and found that it was good wine, but knew not whence it was. None knew but the servants. Thus our Lord was careful to avoid giving His hosts the least pain. He showed that delicate consideration of their feelings which is the basis of true courtesy. I wish to take occasion, from His example, to make a

few remarks on courtesy as part of the Religion of Common Life.

It may be thought by some that the subject is too trifling to be matter for pastoral counsel. For several reasons I am of a different opinion.

Since the Evangelist has recorded this instance of the courtesy of Jesus Christ, it is not surely too unimportant to be taken notice of. We are to copy Christ's example, and it cannot be wrong or unsuitable to observe what that example is even in the minutest particulars.

Besides, the subject is not, after all, of the trifling kind some might suppose. If we look at the comfort of life, it depends a great deal on that friendly intercourse with our fellow-creatures, which consists, to a large extent, in the courteous interchange of mutual civilities and attentions, rather than in anything more serious and striking. A truly enjoyable life is made so, far more by an aggregate of little pleasantnesses, than by any one solitary and extraordinary blessing. And so, on the other hand, there is far more unhappiness caused by an aggregate of little unkindnesses and other little evils, than by the occasional blow of a heavy misfortune. One only of the plagues of Egypt involved the death of the first-born; the rest were minor

plagues of flies and frogs, and the like. Nine-tenths of the plagues and annoyances of life are often of the same petty description—petty as to their cause, but very real and vexatious notwithstanding.

Nor is it our comfort alone that is involved in this matter;—our usefulness likewise is concerned in it. In order to be useful, one must have a certain degree of influence; and influence depends not a little on one's power of pleasing. Especially in private life, it depends very largely upon this cause. We shall be able to exert an influence for good in our various circles very much in proportion as we are liked or loved; and both liking and loving depend for their continuance very much on little daily kindnesses and attentions. Neither of them will subsist long without this daily food. However the one or the other may have sprung into being under the power of some first impression, it is not easy for either to endure long against the blighting influence of little daily discourtesies or neglects. When the cluster is taken away which may have been tied on by the imagination, you will not continue to gather the grapes of love and confidence from the thorns and thistles of rudeness and unkindness.

It is also worth noticing that great principles may be involved in little actions, just as great agents may be at work in little operations. A stone falls to the ground,—it is a small thing; but the stone falls to the ground in consequence of the same power which keeps the planets wheeling in their orbits. So in the moral world. A cup of cold water is a small thing; but it may be given in the name and for the sake of Christ, out of the mighty principle of Christian love; and then it becomes a great thing—great enough to be remembered at the day of judgment! A mite is a trifling coin; but the mite which the widow cast into the treasury was more than the golden shekels of the wealthy Pharisees, because there was heart in it. It was not brass only, it was brass and heart, which was better than gold without heart. Thus, too, a kind word is a small thing,—at least it is cheap,—but it may be a great thing in some respects. There may be a great deal of love in it; there may be in it a whole volume of consolation and sympathy. How often have I seen when a poor brother or sister in trouble thought far more of a kind, sympathetic word, or even a silent shake of the hand, than they would have done of any material gift you could have offered them! A little action of considerate

courtesy, like that of our Lord, may thus be full of real and high Christian feeling. For the poet is undoubtedly right—

“And manners are not idle, but the fruit  
Of loyal nature and of noble mind.”

There is a precept to which our Lord has attached very great importance,—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” The same thing is expressed elsewhere another way,—“Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.” Now, we all like our own feelings to be considered, and to be ourselves treated with courtesy and respect. Our duty to our neighbours is therefore plain. We owe to them what we require at their hands. There is much they have to tolerate in us, and therefore it becomes us to shew to them all long-suffering. There is much in us they have to allow for, and therefore it becomes us to allow for much in them. We have angles and rough edges against which we are angry if they jar, and therefore it is only a fair compensation if we are on our guard not to come in contact with theirs. When exposed to offence, we should be gentle and patient, not quick to wrath, never answering railing for railing, and, even when justly vexed and angry,

still on our guard to avoid all coarseness and roughness in the expression of our feelings, and never to inflict an unnecessary wound. All this is among the legitimate and proper manifestations of the great Christian principle that we are brethren in Christ Jesus.

Of course, courtesy is not religion; but yet the same thing may be said of it which may be said of other virtues universally acknowledged to be of religious importance. For example, honesty is not religion, but a religious man should be honest, and that because he *is* a religious man, and as a result of his religious principles and convictions. Veracity is not religion, but a religious man should be veracious. So neither is courtesy religion, but a religious man should be courteous. It is part of his duty, as a man who professes to be under the golden rule. It is part of his duty, as a man whose principles lead him to consider that in Christ we are all brethren. It is part of his duty, as one who is bound to the practical following of Him who was meek, and gentle, and long-suffering—who, when reviled, reviled not again—who was always sympathising and tender.

Nor let it be supposed that I am attaching an undue importance to a hollow, outward shell of



manners. I attach no importance whatever to a hollow, outward shell of manners, unless it be that if the creature within is really ugly and unpleasant, it is perhaps better,—at least it is more comfortable for his neighbours,—that he should conceal himself within it, if he can. But manners need not be a hollow shell at all; they may be the true expression of a good and generous nature, schooled (possibly by the highest training) into gentleness and love.

There is a certain elegance and gracefulness which result from mingling in polished society, and cannot, in their perfection, be acquired elsewhere. Much though there may sometimes be in these that is merely conventional and outward, they are good for their own uses, and beautiful after their own kind; and though, no doubt, they may be only conventional and outward, yet, on the other hand, they may not be so, but may be, in all truth and sincerity, at once the graceful garb and genuine expression of a kind and loving nature. Still, this species of refinement, depending as it does on an education and society not open to all, cannot be demanded at the hands of all. There is, however, a certain geniality—a certain sympathy with one another, and regard for one another's happiness—a certain art of giving little pleasures in quiet little ways—a certain skill in

avoiding offences and soothing irritations—a certain substantial gracefulness of nature—which is the fruit, in any station, of the presence in the heart of true Christian love, and which in all stations ought to be and can be cultivated.

The virtue, therefore,—for a real and substantial virtue it is,—of which we have been speaking, is for all classes of society. It is likewise for every relative position. It is for equals towards equals,—for inferiors towards superiors,—for superiors towards inferiors,—and it ought to be shewn towards the members of one's own family, as well as towards strangers. People are to be met with who are civil and polite among their equals in public, because they know that their equals will not tolerate anything else, but who are overbearing and tyrannical in their own houses, or, if not overbearing and tyrannical, uncourteous and disagreeable. How wrong this is, and how detrimental to domestic happiness, I need only hint; I need not wait to explain. Certainly in intimate private life our intercourse should be, not stiff and formal, but free and unreserved. But surely it might be free without rudeness, and unreserved without coarseness. Surely we might be natural without being rough or harsh. Nor only might we be so, but in proportion

as our nature is sanctified and refined, we shall certainly become so more and more.

Another very right and Christian-like exercise of courtesy is towards one's servants and dependents. I know few who are better entitled to be respectfully and considerately treated than a good and faithful servant; and, besides that it is right and proper and Christian-like in itself, such treatment has its own reward in the more thorough devotion to your interests which it tends to produce, and in the better and more willing service which it tends to call out. I mention this the rather, that many good people who are ready to acknowledge that they owe a duty to their servants, do not seem to perceive sufficiently that this duty includes respect and courtesy, as well as that attention to more serious interests, which, when separated from these, is neither so gracefully rendered nor so gratefully received.

We should likewise shew courtesy and consideration towards the poor. It is true that people should keep their own place; and their humbler brethren will never wish them to descend out of it; but there is a way of keeping our place without imposing humiliation on our neighbours, and one does not descend out of his proper sphere by speaking to his poor brother or sister as to a fellow-creature.

I must here say, further, that the lessons of this paper are very needful to be learnt, not only by superiors as towards inferiors, but also by inferiors as towards superiors. It would seem to be thought by many that to shew respect and deference to their superiors in worldly position implies a certain unmanly cringing; and, accordingly, they rather affect a freedom, and even bluntness of speech, verging upon incivility. But surely it is not requisite in order to save one's self-respect that he should withhold from others the consideration to which they are entitled; surely roughness of speech and rudeness of manners are not the necessary marks of an independent spirit; and surely one can bow to worth and even to station, without falling in the dust, or stooping in the smallest degree beneath what becomes a man.

And now I have done. In some points of view the duty we have been thinking of is perhaps a little one. But as was said before, we do not discern the greatness of the law of gravitation till we reflect that it is the same law which governs the motions of the planets and determines the falling of a stone to the ground; and so neither do we discover the greatness of religion, until we come to see that the same principles which suggest and produce self-

sacrifice and magnanimity, and all the greater virtues, are diffusive enough in their influence, and large enough in their comprehensiveness, to affect the smallest particulars of our daily conduct and govern our most common talk, shedding a certain pleasing refinement over all we say and do. The same sap which yields the precious wine produces also the delicate bloom upon the outer surface of the grape; which bloom is beautiful in its own way, and shews the cultivation to be good and the vine to be healthy.

## XIV.

### LOST LABOUR.

PROVERBS xii. 27—"The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting."

THE idea in these words manifestly is, that a great deal of labour is often lost because it is not followed up; or, that things in themselves fitted to be useful, and which one may have bestowed much trouble to obtain, often yield no good in the end for want of the additional care and attention which may be necessary to apply them properly to their proper purposes. We follow the chase with energy; but what we may succeed in capturing is often allowed to rot and go to waste.

As an instance of this, there cannot be a doubt that a very large proportion of the poverty and wretchedness to be met with throughout the country is owing to the cause so graphically described by Solomon. It is not, generally speaking, because men are unwilling to work; it may be sometimes because trade is dull, and they cannot find employ-

ment; it may be sometimes because of the necessities of a large young family; but very frequently indeed it is not for any of these reasons, but because of recklessness or dissipation, or some other species of unthrifty management, that so many are in such constant straits, live in such squalid houses, and are every way so pinched and depressed. You visit two families living in the same street,—earnings the same,—house rent the same,—number of children the same,—ages of children about the same,—and yet in every other respect what a complete contrast! You find in the one case everything tidy, clean, respectable,—children at school,—house in the best of order,—prints on the walls and flowers in the windows,—and the large family Bible, with some suitable companions, on the book-shelves near the fire. You find in the other case filth, squalor, confusion, children in rags, everything to indicate misery. Both are the houses of hard-working men. It is not in *that* the difference lies. The difference is that the one is the home of sobriety and thrift; the other, of improvidence and mismanagement.

Nor is it by any means to what are called the working classes only that remarks like these apply. In other ranks of life the same thing holds equally true. It may be to unavoidable misfortune; but, in

a very great number of cases indeed, it is to improvidence and mismanagement, that those embarrassments are attributable which, wherever they exist, are always attended with much discomfort, frequently occasion severe distress, and often lead into great sin. It were to speak with a partiality far from becoming in one who is appointed to urge upon his fellow-creatures the laws of that God who is no respecter of persons, were he to denounce in strong language the improvidence and recklessness which to a large extent prevail among the poor, and yet have not a word to say,—or only the gentlest whisper,—with reference to those extravagant and ostentatious habits too common in the present day among other classes of society, and which are a fertile source both of private suffering and of public scandal.

I cannot think that such observations are of too secular a nature to form the subject of Pastoral Counsel. It will be granted readily that a minister of Christ ought to inculcate the duty of carrying religion into common life. But in doing so, must he confine himself to general terms? May he not sometimes descend into particulars? If so, certainly it is an important particular in the religion of common life, that we should be careful and con-



siderate in the distribution and expenditure of our income, whether large or small. Much room is here afforded for the application of Christian principle, and for the cultivation of self-denial, temperance, and charity. I do not know a more religious thing than to remember habitually, that whatever we have, whether much or little, comes to us through the bounty of God, and ought to be used, therefore, not only with care, but with a certain degree of reverence, and an anxious desire that it be so employed as to promote God's will. For this reason I cannot see that I am departing in the least from the functions which strictly belong to the pastorate if I venture to remind—servants in families, for example, that there is such an institution as the savings' bank, where it might be well for them, while still they are able, to lay up something against an evil day;—working-men's wives, aye, and other men's wives too, that the roasting of what their husbands have caught, or, in other words, the utilising of their husbands' industry by so managing its proceeds as to promote the comfort and welfare of the house, rests in a great measure with them, so that, without being narrow, it is their Christian duty to be prudent and frugal;—working-men themselves, that nothing can be more foolish than to squander

by any sort of intemperance what they have earned with so much sweat of the brow;—and all in every station, that, as it is of God's gift we possess our temporal blessings, as well as our spiritual privileges, so should the former, as well as the latter, be put to use with reverent thankfulness to the great Giver, and in such a way as to advance His glory.

It is a pity that such a virtue as prudence should be looked upon as a secular virtue, and not in any sense Christian or evangelical. A Christian virtue it most unquestionably is, to the practice of which we are under Christian obligations; and were it more fully recognised as a Christian virtue, it would be much less apt to degenerate into narrowness or worldliness. I call it a Christian virtue, because it is a clear Christian principle that every good gift comes down from our gracious Father, and, therefore, is not to be wasted nor despised, but to be applied with care and thoughtfulness to the purposes for which it is given. No doubt there are higher things than to provide for bodily wants, or to take precautions against the evils of penury. But these are duties after their kind, and whoever neglects the lower is weakening himself more or less for the higher and more important. It is very true

that a man is profited nothing if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul. But it is equally true that to a certain extent a man is losing his own soul, if, by thoughtless self-indulgence in the use of the world, or in any other way, he is losing out of it the power of self-government, the ability to control his appetites, the strength to forego a present gratification for the sake of a greater though a future good.

The observation of Solomon is evidently capable of a great many other applications besides that which has thus been made. Perhaps I may be permitted to suggest two.

There is a great deal of "hunting" after sermons. It is to be feared there is not so much as there ought to be of private meditation on Divine things. The preaching of the word would be attended with much greater advantage than it often is, were there more private thought bestowed by those who listen to it on the subjects to which it refers. This would conduce much to improve preaching itself; for, were the preacher well assured that what he has to say would be considered with care, and that those who come to hear him were really looking for light and guidance rather than for what may be showy and exciting, it would be a stimulus to him to take more

trouble, and bestow more thought, with a view to supply what was thus in demand. And then as to the hearers,—it would certainly make them far more intelligent and enlightened Christians. You cannot pour knowledge or feeling from one mind into another as you might pour water from one vessel into another. The mind that receives, as well as the mind that communicates, must be active. What we receive upon the mere authority of another, without turning it round in our own thoughts and satisfying ourselves about it, hardly deserves to be called knowledge at all. It becomes knowledge,—a really useful mental possession,—when we have looked into it for ourselves and made it our own. How this applies in the present instance is clear. Great benefit might be derived from spending the Sunday evening, or a reasonable part of it, in going over with one's children, or in his own thoughts, the exercises of the day, or in reading and considering some relative part of the Word of God. If the sermon has been good, this will impress it. If it has been poor, it will serve to make up for it. In one way or another it will make sure that the day of rest, so precious to all who are desirous to perform well the duties of the days of work, shall not pass without supplying

some food of a solid and healthful and really nourishing kind to support, refresh, and invigorate the soul.

I have only to say further, that the end of Christian knowledge is not in itself. Its end is to animate and direct us in Christian living. We have received God's Holy Word, not simply as a storehouse of matter for reflection, but to be our daily food in our journey through the world. There is, then, a purpose to which our knowledge is to be applied, and, however laboriously that knowledge is sought, unless it be applied to this purpose with care, instead of being in any sense a blessing to us, it will only increase our guilt and condemnation. What is taken in hunting, if slothfully allowed to rot, not only serves no good use, but becomes a nuisance and a mischief. Even so religious knowledge and religious profession, not followed up by the application of our principles in daily life, are worse than unprofitable. Upon ourselves they bring a heavier condemnation, and to those around us they are an offence and scandal. They give to the scoffer occasion to scoff, and to all earnest men occasion to grieve,—as indeed even to Christ Himself in heaven; for, if by anything His heart can be pierced again, we can well believe that

it is less by the opposition of His avowed enemies, than by the godlessness and disobedience of His pretended friends. Let us remember His own words: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

## XV.

### CHARITY.

1 CORINTHIANS xiii.—“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

LET us look first at the characteristics of Christian Charity as described by the Apostle in this chapter.

Verse fourth.—“Charity suffereth long, and is kind.” Here we have, first, the negative; and, secondly, the positive aspect of charity,—first, the passive; and, secondly, the active side. She “suffereth long;”—that is the passive side,—she bears and waits like the patience of God. And “is kind:”—that is the active side,—she occupies herself with deeds of benevolence, seeks to do good and to communicate, shews considerate regard for the welfare, and even the comfort of others,—in short, “is kind;” we know what it means better than we can explain it. They say that the word “kind” comes from the same root with the words “kin” and “kindred.” A “kind” man is thus a “*kin*ned” man; one who feels that other men are his kindred, and desires, therefore, to be tender and gentle to all. I do not know whether this is etymologically correct, but if it be, we have, embodied in our Saxon speech, what is at any rate a true Christian idea, namely, that we owe to one another the love of kinsfolk, being, all of us, the children of God, and brethren in Christ Jesus.

Another feature of true charity is, that she “envieth not.” It is not a grief to her that others are happy; but she joys with them that joy, as well as weeps with them that weep.



Again, "she vaunteth not herself," neither is "puffed up." She has no desire to exalt herself above her neighbours, whom she loveth as herself, according to the golden rule, and therefore would not hurt by any haughty airs or supercilious treatment.

Hence, also, she "doth not behave herself unseemly;" for as she would not hurt them by pride, so neither would she offend them nor cause them to stumble by any behaviour inconsistent with the truth. For her neighbours' sake she is careful of her own conduct, lest peradventure the wicked might scoff or the godly might be grieved. For her neighbours' sake, as well as for her own, and that of her Lord, she seeks to adorn the doctrine of the gospel, and to live before men in all seemliness, and before God in all well pleasing.

But all this is included in what the Apostle says next, and yet more comprehensively;—she "seeketh not her own." She is not wrapped up in her own selfish aims and interests, but, inspired with a higher spirit, she desires and labours to promote the general good. Herein, most eminently of all, does she resemble Him who came from heaven to seek and save the lost, and would not save Himself one pang of that great agony which it behoved Him to endure in bearing the sin of the world.

Hence also, and just because she seeketh not her own, "she is not easily provoked." There is nothing which tends more than selfishness to make one feel the rubs and unpleasantnesses of life, and to render him impatient of contradictions and injuries. But when one's heart is set upon something better and larger than his own good and comfort, he can bear many things that would otherwise have pained or angered him; his pride and self-love are not so much in the way to be trod upon, and thus his temper is less tried, and life is smoother and pleasanter.

Again, true charity "thinketh no evil." This is a difficult attainment, but a very high one. How prone we are to impute ill motives to our neighbours' conduct! How much we are inclined to construe those around us harshly and severely! How too frequent is it even in religious circles to put unkind interpretations on the words and deeds of those who differ from us! But charity "thinketh no evil;" full of gentleness and meekness, she strives always to think the best of every man.

And just as she thinketh no evil, so neither doth she rejoice in it when it is forced upon her observation. She "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth,"—or rather rejoiceth

*with*\* the truth—rejoiceth in those things in which the truth rejoiceth—that is to say, in those things which are right and honourable and conformable to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Few people are base enough to rejoice openly, or even secretly, in a great wrong or a great misfortune; but is it not the case that we hear sometimes with a little quiet zest of some smaller injury that has been done or annoyance that has been suffered? Need I say that this is after the spirit, not of our Lord, but of that Wicked One whose works and ways we have professed that we renounce?

As the last of these characteristics of Christian love we are told that “she beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” Of course this does not mean that charity is indiscriminating. It were not for the good of our brethren that literally *all* things should be borne without resistance, and believed without suspicion. The very spirit of love itself frequently requires that questions should be asked, and wrongs should be opposed. But we know the Apostle’s meaning; he just means to say strongly that love is very patient and very hopeful, not easily discouraged even by ingratitude, gentle in its judg-

\* Thus in the margin and in the Greek.

ments to the very uttermost, and gentle also in its deeds,—gentle and tender as a woman, yet strong as a man in the firm perseverance with which it works and waits.

And now let us look further at what the Apostle tells us concerning the excellence of the grace which he has thus described. He has been speaking in the previous chapter of the diverse gifts bestowed on different individuals in the church, such as “the word of wisdom,” “the word of knowledge,” “gifts of healing,” “prophecy,” “speaking with tongues.” He concludes the chapter by exhorting his Corinthian readers to covet, or desire, earnestly the best gifts; but yet, he adds, “shew I unto you a more excellent way”—which more excellent way, as appears from the chapter before us, is the way of love. You see he does not set little store upon the gifts he has been speaking of. This is clear, for he tells the Corinthians to covet them earnestly. But yet he postpones them all to love.

And they are rightly so postponed; for, first, while gifts are good, graces are better. Wealth, for example, is a gift. But what is the difference in the sight of God between a rich man and a poor man? It is as nothing. On the other hand, what is the difference between an honest man and a

knave? It is wide as the diameter of the world. In the view of Him, to whom all the mysteries of the universe are open, to how slight an elevation above the humblest peasant has the highest philosopher been able to climb, and how few more things does he see and understand! But what is the difference between covetousness and generosity, between wrath and long-suffering, between envy and sympathy, in a word, between selfishness and love? It is wide, deep, and eternal, even as the great fixed gulf which separates hell from heaven.

Again, secondly, graces are above gifts, as the end is above the means. Gifts are given to promote graces. Let us remember that God's end in His government of the world, as it has been revealed to us by His Son, is the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness; and then we shall understand what to value most in life, and how the highest accomplishments, even in the most sacred fields, are truly worth nothing except as they are employed conduively to the advancement of God's work in our own hearts and in the world. It is by our graces that our gifts are made useful; and, in particular, the grace of love has this quality,—this power of utilising everything. Just as we are filled with love,—the love which impels us to do good and

to communicate,—do the possessions of the individual become a treasure to mankind. The Apostle writes, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.” It was because in his case this was a supposition only—it was because he *had* charity—that his great endowments became so valuable to the human race, and, to the joy of thousands upon thousands in his own time and since, his voice has been heard ringing through the world like the sound of a silver jubilee trumpet proclaiming to all men that the day of redemption is come.

Again, thirdly, charity is an excellent grace, because of the blessing she brings into the soul in which she dwells. Charity “seeketh not her own;” but what she seeketh not she nevertheless findeth. There is that seeketh her own and findeth it not;—as, for instance, ambition and worldliness; these seek their own good: but when were they ever satisfied with their attainments? On the other hand, there is that seeketh not her own yet findeth it; and this is the case as respects charity. With the same mantle with which she clothes the naked she is herself warmed and comforted; and when she carries peace into the home of her neighbour, her

peace doth also return into her own bosom. If "she suffereth long and is kind," who does not know that there is a certain delightful inward satisfaction which patience and kindness produce? To the envious every man's blessing becomes a curse; but charity "envieth not," and so to her every man's blessing is a joy. If "she vaunteth not herself, and is not puffed up," then, just because she walks humbly; she is saved many a humiliation. Not "behaving unseemly," she secures respect; and, "not seeking her own," she conciliates affection. "Not easily provoked," she enjoys the calm of a serene mind. "Thinking no evil," she can possess, retain, and relish the pleasures of true friendship, unalloyed by suspicion or mistrust. "Not rejoicing in iniquity, but rejoicing in the truth," hers is an innocent gladness that leads to no remorse or self-accusation afterwards. While, "bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things," she shares in the very happiness of Him, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and, in dying, prayed for His murderers.

Fourthly, charity is that grace in respect of which man may most resemble God, for "God is love."

Fifthly, through charity we can best rise to the

knowledge of God and of His Son Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal. You will see in the end of the chapter that the Apostle speaks a good deal about knowledge. "When I was a child," he says, "I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." It is not by accident that all this about knowledge comes at the end of a chapter upon charity. There is a real and profound connection between the two. There is nothing in respect of which it is more true, that we speak and think as children, than the love of God. All our ideas of God are exceedingly imperfect; but in no particular are they more so than in this. How we narrow and limit to our own great harm and loss a love which is free as the light of heaven, or the air of the morning! How we narrow it by fancies that it must be bought with a price,\* that it goes out only towards some, that it de-

\* The Scriptures say that *we* are bought with a price, never that God's love has been bought with a price. God's love is self-originating, and it was God's love which paid the price by which *we* are bought.



pende on arbitrary choice, or is conditioned upon something in its objects,—how we narrow it, I say, by these and other similar forms of unbelief and self-righteousness. If our own hearts were larger than they are, if we were ourselves more loving, we should understand better this glorious attribute of the Almighty, and should be able to believe in it more thoroughly and unreservedly. It was just as he became a man in Christ, entering into the likeness of Christ's love, that the Apostle was enabled to put away the childish things, the narrowness and bigotry of his earlier years, and to appreciate and proclaim that glorious free gospel of which his epistles are full.

And the same principle holds also for another world. Our hope is, that there "we shall know as also we are known." Now, what does this mean? How shall we know as also we are known? Can we ever comprehend God as God comprehends us? In one sense it cannot be; we can never comprehend the infinite nature of Him who made us, with the same thoroughness with which our nature is comprehended by Him. But God became man, and therefore we are known in heaven, not only as the creature is known by the Creator, but as the things of a man are discerned by

the spirit of a man; that is to say, not only thoroughly, but sympathisingly, because our Lord became our brother, and entered into all our feelings as one of ourselves. And this, I think, is what is meant by knowing "as we are known." We shall know sympathisingly through being conformed to the Divine image. Being filled with the Spirit of God we shall fully realise the love of God, and be happy therein for ever and ever.

It only remains that I say a word on the last verse of the chapter. "And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

The meaning of this verse is often misconceived. It is frequently understood as if the Apostle meant that faith and hope were to pass away, but charity was to be eternal; whereas, in point of fact, he plainly says that all three are eternal—all three things that abide.\* And indeed it must be so.

\* This misconception is countenanced by the Paraphrase we are accustomed to sing:—

"Hope shall to full fruition rise,  
And Faith be sight above;  
These are the means, but this the end;  
For saints for ever love."

It will be seen, however, quite evidently, on looking at the words of the Apostle himself, that the idea in his mind was as I have indicated.

Faith must be an abiding thing. There must be faith in heaven,—faith in the powerful and loving protection of the Almighty,—else the happiness of heaven would not be perfect. In like manner, if it is true that we are to ascend eternally nearer and nearer to God, up through that immeasurable interval which separates the finite from the infinite, and gives endless scope for progress, then also is there endless room for hope. It is not over the gate of heaven that the words are written, “Who enters here leaves hope behind.” Faith and hope, then, are eternal, no less than charity. In this respect they do not differ. But charity is the greatest of the three. And that for a plain reason. Faith and hope are noble and excellent; but they are human. You do not think of them as belonging to the Divine nature. But GOD IS LOVE; and therefore of all the graces love is the most God-like, and “he who dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him.”

## XVI.

### PRAYER.

1 THESSALONIANS v. 17—"Pray without ceasing."

OF course this does not mean that we are to be always in the attitude, or using the words, of prayer. It has, however, at the same time, a meaning that is strictly literal. We are always to maintain a dependent spirit; and a life of dependence is a life of prayer. To preserve habitually a sense of God's nearness to us, and to be open and anxious at all times to hear His voice, whether speaking in providence or in the thoughts of our hearts within us,—this, in a high and true sense, is a life of continual prayer.

What I chiefly wish, however, to say at present is, that this spirit of prayer must have expression in acts of prayer. In no one did the spirit of prayer ever dwell in larger measure than in our Lord Jesus Christ. But we know that, besides preserving always a devout habit of mind, He frequently en-

gaged in acts of devotion. He joined in the worship of the synagogue; and we are told of His prolonged and earnest private prayers on various occasions. I am sure that, in our case, apart from acts of devotion, the spirit of prayer would soon die. Not long should we be found acknowledging God in the world in a real living manner were we to become forgetful of the duties of the closet and of the sanctuary.

We stand related to God in three different ways. First, as *individuals*, having each of us a private individual life of our own, with blessings and trials peculiar to ourselves; with our own peculiar wants, and weaknesses, and besetting sins, and subject, each of us, to our own personal responsibility. Secondly, as *members of families*, connected in a special manner with certain of our fellow-creatures, in whose blessings and whose trials, in whose joys and whose sorrows, we have a special interest and share. Thirdly, as *members of society*, connected in a manner less close, but still very real and intimate, with our neighbours around us.

Answering to these different positions in which we thus stand towards God, there are suitable acts of prayer. There is, first, private prayer; secondly, family prayer; thirdly, public prayer.

## PRIVATE PRAYER.

Of the reasons for private prayer, or the advantages of it, it is not my intention to speak. I wish to say,—

First, that private prayer should be attended to with regularity. Very natural times for private prayer are the morning and the evening, and we should strictly adhere to the practice of drawing near to our Maker at these times. Of course we are not confined to these. The way to a throne of grace is always open, and there may often be circumstances which may suggest our making use of it on other occasions. But, as a matter of rule, the times that have been mentioned ought to be strictly adhered to. It is hardly imaginable that there can ever be an excuse sufficient to justify us for neglecting to begin and end the day with God. I would add—

Secondly, that even when we do not feel ourselves as much as we could wish in a devotional frame of mind, we ought not to omit our private prayers at the stated seasons. It is very true that prayer does not consist in the mere uttering of devotional words, but, to be acceptable, must proceed from the heart. It is also very true that there are occasions when even the most pious people feel themselves, and are

grieved to feel themselves, by no means in a prayerful mood. We should be wrong, I think, to omit our devotions in such circumstances on the ground that our heart is not going with the exercise. There may be so far a real prayer in the regret we feel on account of our wrong condition, and in the act of devotion the spirit may come. I think, too, that in such circumstances help might be got sometimes in bringing ourselves into a proper frame from spending a little time in reading some devout book, or some good—that is simple and natural—devotional poetry. I would suggest—

Thirdly, that our private prayers ought to be, at least on frequent and suitable occasions, more detailed and particular than perhaps they sometimes are. Our public prayers must be expressed chiefly in general terms, for the obvious reason that they are intended to embody the feelings and wants of an assembly of men. Our family prayers may with propriety be more minute, for it is right and for edification, when done in a seemly and reverent manner, to allude in them to domestic events. Still, even they must be general to some extent, for they too are prayers to be joined in by more than one person, and therefore to be couched in language in which all may unite. But

when we kneel in our closets, it is certainly important that we should be more specific. It is not enough to confess in a general way that we are sinful creatures, but we ought to confess our special sins specially, to call to remembrance our special faults and shortcomings, and humbly to acknowledge them with their special aggravations. In like manner, we ought to pray, not only generally for grace and guidance, but specially for the growth and increase of the particular graces in which we may find ourselves deficient, or which are specially called for by the peculiar circumstances in which we may be placed. It is easier to be general than to be special in our prayers. It takes less trouble, and is less humiliating. It does not humble a man nearly so much to say in general terms, "I am a sinner," as to say in special terms, "I have committed this or that particular sin." It does not humble him so much, but for that very reason it does not profit him so much. Our prayers would be much more useful to us than they are, did they spring, more than it may be feared we are commonly careful they should do, out of the actual facts of our daily life. Even in private devotions we should never be familiar, for the presence of God is always solemn and awful, and to be approached into with reverence



as well as with trust; but it does seem, for the reasons just assigned, that in these exercises it would be for our advantage to be, generally speaking, as specific as possible. I would say—

Fourthly, that while our private prayers ought always to have reference to the facts of life and feeling, and while, therefore, they ought always to be engaged in considerably, it is desirable now and then to set apart particular seasons for still more special prayer than is ordinarily possible from day to day. I believe that pious members of the Church of England often use the season of Lent for this purpose. We of the Church of Scotland might use with great advantage the days for humiliation and prayer commonly observed in connection with the dispensation of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and perhaps some other days marked in our own private history; not that these latter are to be kept ostentatiously, or even to the knowledge of our friends; but, alone in our closets, we might find time for some special thought and special communion with our Father in heaven. Permit me to add—

Fifthly, what perhaps I may best illustrate by reference to an example recorded in the second chapter of the Book of Nehemiah. We are there

told that when Nehemiah had gone into the presence of King Artaxerxes to make a certain request of great importance, before he began to speak "he made his prayer to the God of heaven." No one saw him make this prayer; he did not kneel down to make it; he did not make it in words; no one could tell from any outward sign that his thoughts had ascended to another King in whose hand are the hearts of the princes of the earth; but they had so ascended notwithstanding; he had sent up a silent prayer in the true spirit of faith and piety. May not we learn that, in addition to the prayers of stated seasons, we might often, with much advantage, breathe, from the very midst of our secular works and cares, a silent petition for grace and guidance? Such prayer ought to be most strictly silent and unostentatious; but it might often do us good, and certainly it seems to be nothing more than is reasonably suggested by a sincere persuasion that God, who is ever on our right hand and on our left, ought to be acknowledged in all our ways, and is ready to fulfil the promise that He will direct our steps.

#### FAMILY PRAYER.

In regard to this duty I make the same assump-

tion as in regard to private prayer, namely, that the reasons for it, and the advantages of it, will be admitted.

Assuming thus much, I would say, that, like private prayer, it is a duty which ought to be attended to with regularity, and for which the morning and evening are very appropriate times. In making this observation, however, it is, I think, important to add that we are not so absolutely bound to both these seasons that no deviation is in any case allowable. There may be circumstances in which it is impossible to have family worship twice a day, as for instance when a man goes out to his work early in the morning, and perhaps does not return, or returns for only a short time, till his work is over in the evening. The wife, indeed, might often take her husband's place in conducting the exercise. But still there are many cases in which we must make, in fairness, the admission we have done. When it happens, however, that there cannot be family worship twice a day, this is no reason why it should not be observed once. Twice might be best, but there is no absolute rule on the subject; and once is infinitely better than not at all. It is important, I think, to say this frankly, because if twice be insisted on as in all cases necessary, people

who find it impossible may be tempted to neglect the duty altogether.

Some people excuse themselves on the ground that they are not qualified to perform the duty in a proper manner. In the family, as well as elsewhere, the language we use in prayer should certainly be well-ordered, and I will not argue that because what God considers is the heart, it is no matter what language we employ; but I say, first, that with the aid of the great store of devotional expressions to be found in Scripture, any man of ordinary intelligence may learn, by practice, to conduct family worship with propriety; and I add, secondly, that there is no reason why the help should not be used of one or other of those many manuals of prayer which have been published from time to time. Excellent books of this sort are accessible at a cheap rate; and the General Assembly of our Church has lately taken a very practical method of exhorting her members to make use, should they feel it necessary, of this kind of help, by authorising a Committee to publish, as part of the "Aids to Devotion" they were appointed to draw up, a small collection of prayers for family use.

I began this part of the present Counsel by saying that the reasons for family worship and the ad-

vantages of the duty will be admitted. So I am sure they will be by all professing Christians. But there is reason to fear that the duty is, for all that, very much neglected. Is this justifiable? Is it excusable? Is it not a great sin? Should these words reach any head of a house who has not yet erected in his dwelling a family altar, I would beseech him to consider the subject, and to act according to his convictions. He may have a feeling that he would be ashamed to begin, but this is a false modesty easily to be got over by a little manly resolution. To continue to neglect what he admits to be his duty, and a duty most useful to himself and his children, would be the real disgrace.

#### PUBLIC PRAYER.

We are expressly commanded in Holy Scripture not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, so that, on this ground alone, there is a plain and conclusive reason why we should regard it as obligatory upon us to join in the public worship of God habitually and regularly.

But, besides the positive commandment, there are reasons in the nature of the case. People may say that they can read as good a sermon at home as they are likely to hear in church. I admit they can.

But even were sermon-hearing the only or chief part of public worship, there is something in the living voice, and in the sympathy of assembled fellow-creatures, which makes a sermon heard very different from a sermon read, and fitted differently to serve its uses. The latter may very possibly be a better composition, but there are accessories of great importance which the former has and the latter wants.

Moreover, sermon-hearing is *not* the only nor the chief part of public worship. We in Scotland are too much accustomed to think that it is. And I do not know, notwithstanding all that is sometimes said on the subject, that our neighbours in England are much better. It is said that people in Scotland talk of "going to sermon," while people in England talk of "going to prayers." I rather think that "going to church" is the way in which it is commonly expressed by both the one and the other. The truth is, we all know that while the sermon is important in its way, the prayers and the praises of the congregation are more important still. It is only in company with our brethren that we can render thanks for common blessings; and, though God is the Hearer and Answerer of all prayer that is earnest, it is only when we join with our brethren that we come

within the scope of our blessed Lord and Saviour's special and great promise, "When two of you agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Let us remember likewise that this kind of worship should always be prefaced and followed by the other two. I mean that public worship should be prefaced and followed by the prayers of the family and of the closet. We go to church far too much as a matter of course. Were we to prepare for the services of the sanctuary by private and family prayer, for those who are to conduct them, for ourselves, and for our fellow-worshippers, we should be much more in a position reasonably to look for a blessing; and, were we afterwards to pray for the deepening and confirmation of impressions made, and for grace to carry them out in our conduct, we should discover, with a fulness of which we have perhaps but little idea, how true it is that while Paul may plant, and Apollos water, it is God that gives the increase.

## XVII.

### SELF-EXAMINATION

#### IN PREPARATION FOR THE COMMUNION.

1 CORINTHIANS xi. 28—"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup."

WITH respect to the obligation of the duty of self-examination before coming to the Lord's Table, it might, in one view, be enough to say that it is a commanded duty. It is enjoined upon us by an authority to which we are bound to submit. The words of St Paul are clear and plain.

But we are under a law of liberty. In other words, the commandments of the New Testament are such, that, upon consideration, we can see their intrinsic reasonableness and propriety. This certainly is the case in the present instance. In coming to the Communion we profess in a very solemn way, and as in the presence of the heart-searching God, that we accept His gospel, and that we are, however imperfect, yet genuine disciples of His blessed Son. No reasonable man who con-



siders the solemnity of the act would be willing to make this profession without asking himself first, whether he can make it with truth; whether he is really confessing himself a sinner in the sight of God, and is truly thankful for the salvation provided in Christ, and truly desirous to keep His precepts and copy His example. Even were there no such commandment as that of St Paul to be found in the New Testament, there is a commandment in the very nature of the holy Communion itself to put such questions to one's own heart.

It is also evident that the exercise of self-examination is fitted to be highly useful in various ways; so useful, that we may well regard it as an important benefit of the sacrament, that it directs us to this duty from time to time.

It is useful, considering the deceitfulness of the heart. We are apt to go on quietly, contented with ourselves, and imagining that all is well, when in truth it may be far otherwise, as a very little honest thought would shew. The honest thought of a single serious hour would often make us blush for that on which we pride ourselves; would often startle us out of a foolish and injurious self-complacency; would often change a boast into a

confession; would tear the mask from many a sin; would stir up, so that we might taste it in time, the wormwood at the bottom of many a cup of forbidden enjoyment; would warn us from many a precipice, and save us from many a pang.

It is useful, considering the great danger to which even the best Christians are exposed of becoming remiss, of sinking into indolence, of departing from the warmth of their first love. Not only the unbelieving and impenitent may flatter themselves that there is peace when there is no peace; but the sincere Christian may go to sleep. He may take rest when he ought to be pressing forward; he may greatly need to be stirred up, to be quickened, to be aroused to the evil of sins into which he has been beguiled, and to be animated to greater watchfulness and more anxious exertion. Here again, therefore, there is use for self-examination. Have we been doing our best? Have we been guarding with sufficient care against the temptations of the world? Have we been, to the utmost of our ability, improving our privileges? Have we been doing the most we could for the cause and kingdom of Christ? Are we stronger and better men in all that constitutes man's real strength and goodness than we were when last we vowed our vows before the Lord? Or, on

the contrary, has any sinful thing been stealing into greater power over our hearts and affections? It is a great benefit that an ordinance comes round from time to time which leads us to put these questions. It is a great good to the soul. It is a means of grace which no one who reflects an instant will fail to value, and no one who desires his own true welfare will fail to use. It leads us to draw near again to the fountain of cleansing, that the garments may be washed there, which, in the case of us all, have been more or less stained in the course of our journey. It tends to deepen the salutary sense of our own infirmity, and of the continual need of a higher strength than we of ourselves possess. It goes to bring it home as a lesson of experience, that he who would live aright must watch and pray.

I think I ought to observe, however, that this most important duty may be gone about in a morbid manner, and even carried to a morbid extent. One reason, as it seems to me, why exhortations on the subject often fall so powerless, is, that this is not sufficiently acknowledged, or rather that exaggerated statements are made, representing as necessary a degree and nicety of introspection which is felt instinctively to be excessive and injurious. We

know that in the case of many physical diseases it is not good for a man to brood continually on his own sensations;—it is good, on the contrary, to have his mind turned from himself and occupied with other subjects. Every one is well aware of this; and there is a parallel truth in the spiritual world. It is not good to be always dissecting our own motives. This turns the mind in upon itself in many cases when it ought to be directed outward to others, and tends to produce a kind of spiritual hypochondria. The main business of life is not the analysis of motives, but the doing of the will of God. Toward this end it is useful that we should pause from time to time and look into the state of our own hearts. But it can be done from time to time only. By attempting more, there is a danger that we may make our religion consist, rather in a nice and subtle anatomy of our own spirits, than in a faith that looks outward to God, and in a love that exerts itself for the good of our brethren. There is a time for acting, and there is a time for reflecting upon what we have done, and in what spirit we have done it. There is a time for the journey, and there is a time for sitting down by the wayside to consider how we have progressed, and whither our path is leading us. Truth ever lies between ex-

tremes. If you are afflicted with some disease, and allow your mind to brood upon it, the probability is it will become worse. On the other hand, if you turn away your thoughts from it determinedly, refusing to give any heed to its symptoms, the probability is the same. It is thus likewise in the spiritual world. Let a man brood always on his own wretchedness as the subject of sin, and let him always be seeking out the sin and imperfection that mingle with his best deeds; or, on the other hand, let him obstinately refuse to consider the subject at all, turning away his eyes from it, and using every artifice to banish it out of mind, and you will have in either case injurious spiritual effects. In the latter he will become hardened in impenitence. In the former he is simply practising a species of ingenious self-torment, which may hinder religion by being mistaken for it. The true method is to have pauses for reflection; to work while it is day, but sometimes in the quiet evening to sit down and think how the work of the day might have been better done,—which thought will be profitable for to-morrow.

Self-examination must be conducted in private. This is obvious. The public exercises of the Church usually attended in preparation for the Communion,

must in no way be considered as a substitute for it.

To be useful, it must be conducted honestly. There are other temptations to cast a cloak over our sins besides those which arise from the desire to make a fair appearance in the eye of the world. Our pride of heart, the discomfort of standing ill with ourselves, the pleasantness of a quiet self-complacency, and many other causes which have their seat in the corruption of our nature, induce us only too often to practise self-deception. It is most important, therefore, that we should keep this danger in view, and make an earnest effort of mind to guard against it. If one were going to consult a physician for some fraudulent purpose,—as, for example, to have it made appear that his life was a good life, when in truth it was not so,—in such a case he would endeavour to conceal his symptoms; and the more skilful the physician, so much the worse for him. On the other hand, if one were desirous not merely to pass for well, but to be well, it would then be his interest to spread out in the fullest detail all the particulars of his case, and he would rejoice in the skill of the physician. Many people would like to attain eternal happiness without giving up their sins. They would wish to be saved

without being made holy. This is to wish merely to pass for well; and such a wish opens the door for all manner of self-deceit; nor can they who have it rejoice truly in the skill of the great Physician, seeing it can only ensure that the evil which is in them will be brought to light. But when we understand that indeed there can be no salvation apart from holiness, holiness itself being the very health of the soul,—when we see that our sin is the evil from which most of all we require to be delivered,—and when, under this conviction, it becomes our earnest wish to be cured of this sad malady,—immediately we are led to spread out our whole case, to rejoice in the perfect knowledge of our inmost heart which is possessed by Him to whom we apply for healing, and to make our humble prayer that He would both help us to know ourselves, and would also, according to His wisdom and by such probing—of the Word, of conscience, and of Providential dealings,—as He may see to be necessary, search us and try us, so as to deliver us from every root of bitterness. Towards a candid self-examination, therefore, one chief preliminary is that we should see and know that our worst misery lies in our sinfulness itself, and that the salvation we are seeking for must contain as its

chief element our being conformed to the righteousness of God.

I need not here refer to the obvious importance of using God's Word as a guide in self-examination. But as I am speaking at present with more special reference to the Communion, it may be proper to remark that, in order to our feeling warranted to engage in that ordinance, it is not necessary that the result of our self-examination should be to leave us satisfied with our own condition, or even, indeed, free from doubts and fears. To the former result a candid self-examination can never conduct any sincere mind in the present imperfect world. As regards the latter; if we have a real desire to be delivered from the doubts and fears which distress us, and from that unbelief and those sins which lead to them, not only are we at liberty, but we ought, to use with thankfulness the gracious institution provided for our comfort, and refreshing, and encouragement. The Sacrament is not a seal of perfection, but an instrument thereunto; and to come to the Lord's Table is not to declare that we are satisfied with ourselves, but that we repent of our sins, and place our trust in Christ, and desire the increase of our Christian graces.



There is nothing I feel it necessary to add, except that our self-examination should be accompanied with humble prayer to Almighty God, who alone can render any of the exercises of the spiritual life truly beneficial to our souls.

## XVIII.

### SUNDAY.

MATTHEW xii. 8—"The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath-day."

THE Scriptures, especially the New Testament Scriptures, leave a great deal to the good sense and good feeling of their readers. They do not give us detailed rules as to every particular of our duty, but are content to furnish instructions of a more general kind, leaving it to Christian intelligence to apply them for itself, under that guidance from above which is promised to all who are sincerely desirous to do the will of God. They do not shew us always the exact course we are to follow, but they point out the rocks or quicksands on either side, and leave it to ourselves to steer our way through the channel of deep water between. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount, there is a beacon set upon the rock of ostentation, when we are told that in giving our alms we ought not to let our left hand know what our right hand doeth, and on the other side there is another beacon placed

upon the quicksand of false modesty, when we are directed to let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Between the two extremes it is left to our own understanding and sense of propriety to take the course which may be best according to varying circumstances.

It seems to me that these remarks are not without a bearing on the subject of Sunday observance. I believe that in this matter also not a little is left, under the New Testament dispensation, to the intelligence and right feeling of Christian people.

The practice of observing one day in seven as a sacred day did not owe its origin to the law of Moses. It existed before the law, and the law only adopted it, and laid down regulations, in harmony with the rest of the Jewish system, as to the mode in which the day ought to be kept. Accordingly, it does not follow that when the law was abolished, this institution was abolished too. As it existed before the law and independently of the law, it did not necessarily fall with the abrogation of the law. Perhaps the force of this argument will be all the more readily admitted when we keep in mind that it is exactly analogous to one of those which St

Paul uses in his Epistle to the Galatians, on the great subject of the admission of the Gentiles to gospel privilege. The true children of Abraham (so he reasons) are those who partake in the faith of Abraham, for it was through faith that Abraham received the promise of the covenant into which it pleased God to enter with him; and, adds the Apostle, this covenant thus confirmed with Abraham, "the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, could not disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." This, it is evident, is virtually the same mode of reasoning which applies in the case of the day of rest.

We farther learn from Scripture and the universal tradition of the Christian Church, that the first day of the week has been observed as a sacred day among Christians from the earliest times, the principle of one day in seven having been retained, though the day was changed, for well-known reasons, from the seventh to the first.

If to these considerations there be added the usefulness of the institution as furnishing a day of rest from secular labour, and also the great value of the day as affording opportunity for religious exercises, the reasons for its observance seem conclusive. It may be said that to the Christian, living under a

spiritual dispensation, every day should be alike, because he ought to live always to the glory of God. There is no doubt we ought to live always to the glory of God. But from this the consequence referred to by no means follows. Every act that we do should be done to God's glory—should be, that is, in a certain sense, religious, or an act of worship. But it does not therefore follow that special religious exercises, such as prayer, are of no use. On the contrary, they are necessary, in order to keep up in our minds a religious tone. We must attend to our devotions in order that we may do all other things devoutly. In the same way, though it is quite true that every day should be spent religiously, it is highly useful towards this end that a special day should be set apart for such exercises as may tend to quicken, sustain, and guide our religious feeling. In a world where we have so much to do that is of a secular description, any serious attempt to make every day alike, however it might answer in some exceptional cases, would certainly end, generally speaking, not in elevating week-days to a Sunday level, but in bringing down the Sunday to a week day level; and all the days, Sundays and week-days together, to a level of worldliness so low and noxious, that we should soon discover to our cost

its fatal effects upon the moral and spiritual health and even upon the material welfare of the whole community.

It is thus of the highest importance that Sunday should be well kept. At the same time, we are not now under the strict rule of the ancient Jewish law upon the subject. All the Evangelists have preserved instances of our Lord's teaching and practice in reference to the Sabbath, and on every occasion we find Him adopting views of a less strict character than the law of Moses was considered to require; and not only so, but in such passages as that where He declares that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," and again, that "the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath-day," He lays down the principles upon which His practice proceeded in a way, which, especially when taken in connection with the teaching of St Paul, would seem very distinctly to imply that whatever was peculiarly Mosaic in the law upon the subject was abrogated along with the rest of the Mosaic institutions. St Paul tells the Colossians to "let no man judge them in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath-days, which are a shadow of things to come, the body being of Christ;" and again

he writes to the Judaising Galatians, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years; I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain;" and when such sayings as these are looked at in the light which is thrown upon them by recollecting what our Lord said and did, for my own part I cannot see an escape from the conclusion I have stated.

It would seem, then, that on the one hand it is our duty to observe one day in seven as a sacred day, and that on the other we are no longer subject to the detailed strictness of the Mosaic law. It thus remains for Christian intelligence and right feeling to guide us how we ought to act. I am aware that views like these appear to some lax and dangerous, opening the door to all manner of neglect and irreligion. I cannot think, however, that such an accusation is just. In point of fact, there are countless instances in which we have no other guides than those to which, under God's Spirit, we must trust in this case. It is the opinion of most Christians that the old Mosaic rules as to tithes, thank-offerings, and the like, are abolished; at the same time it is an admitted Christian duty that we ought to contribute of our substance towards charitable and pious ends; to what extent, however,

it must, in the circumstances, remain for Christian intelligence and feeling to decide. "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" it was asked of our Lord—"until seven times?" When our Lord answered, "Not until seven times only, but until seventy times seven," the answer meant, in principle, there is no special rule; you must just be guided by the spirit of love. It is a similar principle which, as it seems to me, applies in the case of Sunday. And I think we may trust it safely; more safely than any other. Irreligious people will not be more likely to spend the day aright, although you take what may appear the higher, but is really the lower, ground of regarding the disposal of every moment of it as matter of positive law. While, on the other hand, religious people who desire God's glory and their own spiritual progress, and that of those over whom they have influence, will value the day enough to use it very carefully and thriftily.

I believe that stricter views as to Sunday than the New Testament warrants, have often acted as a snare to the conscience. Of course, it is not a rule we can go upon that we ought to regulate our views by our practice. Were that method adopted, we should soon sink low enough. We are to try to



elevate our practice to our views. But this implies that our views be rational and practicable. Now, it is physically and mentally impossible to keep the attention directed throughout the whole of a day, without any intermission or change, to one class of subjects. This cannot be done any day whatever, or in regard to any class of subjects whatever, unless under the influence of some very strong and abnormal excitement. In ordinary cases, it is wholly beyond our power; and I am sure it has often been a snare to the conscience when views have been held requiring on the Lord's day this impossible thing. I am inclined to believe, for instance, that such over-strictness has often something to do with the lapse into irreligion there is not unfrequently occasion to lament in children of godly parents.

In accordance with these ideas, it is important, I think, that Sunday should be made a pleasant day to the young. This could be accomplished in many ways, which wise and thoughtful and kindly parents can easily discover for themselves, without any necessity for going to the extreme of converting it into a day of mere amusement. Some little enjoyment might make it a day of pleasant associations; and there is a mode of giving the religious

lessons, to which a godly parent is sure to devote some reasonable portion of every Sunday, so that, instead of being felt at all irksome or disagreeable, they will be received with pleasure and remembered with delight.

As to older people; I certainly do not consider it a sin that a man with his wife and children should take a quiet walk for an hour on a Sunday evening. This might be good in various ways for both physical and mental health, and indeed, in frequent circumstances, for spiritual health too; for, when thus refreshed, one may return with all the greater zest and liveliness of thought and emotion to any of the peculiar exercises of the day which may yet remain. I cannot see that an admission like this at all opens the door, as is sometimes alleged, for a Sunday of mere gaiety and frivolity. There is surely a medium, which it is not impossible, nor even very hard, for good sense and right feeling to strike, between the strictness of Judaism and the licence of unbelief. It is surely imaginable that a man may be allowed a quiet walk without its being implied that he may neglect to attend church, or to apply his mind privately to the reading of the Scriptures and prayer,—or that trains and steamers are to run on Sunday just as at any other time,—or that all sorts

of places of public amusement are to be thrown open.

It is strictly in harmony with the principles laid down, to say that the employment of labour on Sunday ought, as far as possible, to be discouraged. All are entitled to that day of rest, and, except in so far as necessary causes may intervene, all should be allowed it. When an advocate of the strictest views is himself found using, let us say, some public conveyance on Sunday, it may afford fair enough ground for a charge of inconsistency against him. But arguments of this sort are constantly run away with, and you will hear people speaking as if inconsistency like this was their own justification for going into an extreme of laxness. That one who is a supporter of austere ideas in reference to Sunday observance, should find himself sometimes unable to act up to his own nearly impracticable theory, is a good reason why he should judge charitably of others,—probably also why he should reconsider his own notions,—but it certainly affords no reason at all why those who differ from him in opinion should adopt or recommend practices, which, if generally embraced, would unquestionably result in depriving very many of that weekly rest which is so beneficial.

While holding the moderate views I have thus endeavoured to state, I think it is quite in harmony with them, and I very earnestly urge, that we ought to consider it a most necessary duty to keep the Lord's day in a manner which can truly and conscientiously be described as keeping it sacred. For high purposes of the spiritual life, it is necessary we should have seasons set apart for private and public worship, and for meditation on Divine things. There is no temple in Heaven, because it is all a temple—all sacred ground. It might be said, in like manner, that there will be no Sunday in Heaven, because then we shall have entered the eternal rest. In this world, however, we cannot do without those ordinances with which we shall be able to dispense hereafter. Were it not for our Churches and Sundays, religion would soon die. As we value, then, our own highest interests, and those of our brethren, we shall greatly esteem that weekly opportunity which is provided for us of turning our thoughts away from the world, and directing them to the things that belong to our eternal peace. We shall deem it a great privilege that we are thus enabled to escape for a little, from time to time, out of the weary round of worldly works and cares; and, with the solicitude of which

so high a privilege is worthy, we shall seek, both in our private arrangements and by our public influence, to preserve it safe for ourselves and those we love. In a word, we shall strive to observe our Sundays as becomes those who are aware of the need for ordinances in our present imperfect state; of the importance towards the right use of all the other days of the week, that the first day should be well kept; and of the solemn, ever-to-be-remembered truth, that a man is profited nothing though he gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul.

## XIX.

### PLACES AND FORMS OF WORSHIP.

[The following is a Sermon which was preached in Glasgow Cathedral on Sunday Morning, June 15, 1862, on occasion of the re-opening of the Church after the erection of the great East Window. With the alteration of only a few sentences, it is printed just as it was preached.]

1 CHRONICLES xxix. 1—"The palace is not for man, but for the Lord God."

YOU will have conjectured already, on hearing the text, that the beautiful addition which has just been made to the decoration of this Church has suggested my subject this morning.

We have in the text King David's statement of the reason which made him desirous that the temple to be built by his son and successor should be a magnificent one;—it was to be a "palace not for man, but for the Lord God."

God is to be served with our best. That is the principle on which the text proceeds.

Of course our heart is our best, and nothing can ever compensate for the withholding of that. But

inward feeling must have outward expression; and it does appear a reasonable manifestation of the religious sentiment that the sanctuaries set apart for Divine worship should, in all cases, be decent and seemly; and, when possible, of a stately and solemn beauty, so as to be in some measure worthy of their sacred use.

Weak-minded people, who are fond of declamatory platitudes, may put it as an objection that no sanctuary of man's building can ever be worthy of the Lord of Hosts. 'Heaven, even the heaven of heavens, cannot contain Him; how much less any house that man can erect!' Very true and good; a quotation from Scripture. Yes; but from what part of Scripture? Who said it? Solomon said it, the wisest of men. Yes; but when did he say it? He said it at the very time he was consecrating the temple. It is part of the consecration prayer. He said it at the very time he was setting apart to its sacred use a house on which he had expended the treasures of his empire. In short, the objection goes too far. No house can contain God;—true;—it might be a reason against churches altogether;—if there are to be churches at all, it is no reason now, any more than in the days of Solomon, why they should not be beautiful.

But the decoration of churches may lead to superstition. This may be started perhaps as another objection. And it must be admitted that there are Church decorations which are associated historically with superstitious ideas, and may have a dangerous tendency to excite them. But the use of these may be avoided. For the rest, if there may be a superstitious reliance on forms and display, it is to be remembered that there may be, too, an equally superstitious reliance on the want of them; the one superstition being noway more respectable or sensible than the other. The cure for superstition, and the only cure, is intelligence; and I hope it is possible to see intelligently that there is no salvation but through Christ, and no true piety but that of the heart, even though the light by which one reads his Bible should shine through a painted window.

Negatively, then, I am not aware of any valid objection to beautiful churches.

Positively, on the other hand, they have many recommendations.

First, as has been urged already, "The palace is not for man, but FOR THE LORD GOD."

Next, I think we shall all admit that there is something in the architecture and general appearance of a church which may be favourable to devo-



tion. Those of us who are accustomed to worship regularly within these ancient walls must have felt this sometimes. True, it is not altogether an effect of the architecture. It is partly an effect of those ancient associations which of course cannot operate in a modern church, however beautiful. Why should I hesitate to repeat to you what struck myself at the time, and has often come back to my recollection since? One day, a friend whom I met in the nave said to me, "I like to worship in this church, for it always reminds me that Christianity is older than the Reformation." I have often since recalled this saying. One may surely be thankful for his blessings as a Protestant, and yet glad to reflect that Christianity is older than the Reformation,—that there were saintly men in what we call the dark ages,—men, too, some of them, of a wonderful genius, which, with all our boasting, we have not rivalled in various walks,—and whom we shall meet, and know, and love in heaven. I know not what you think, but somehow, speaking for myself, I always feel the happier when any such reflection helps me to realise the comprehensiveness of Christianity. But I am wandering from the point. I said there may be something in the architecture and general appearance of a church

favourable to devotion, just as there is something in beautiful church music. Now, if God has so made us that art may awaken piety, is it pious to deny our constitution? If God has so created us that devotional feelings may be excited or intensified through the eye or the ear, it is hard to understand on what ground we can reasonably or piously refuse this natural help to religion.

Further, let me quote the text again: "The palace is not for man, but for the Lord God." It is obvious what King David meant. If great men build palaces for themselves, surely Jehovah of Hosts is worthy of a still more beautiful and costly habitation. But suppose he had been thinking of poor men, and not of great men. My friends, just because the Church is the palace of the Lord God, therefore also it is the palace of the poor man. I have no love for the idea of splendid churches for the rich, and humble mission-houses for the poor. The latter are indeed necessary in their place, but they should always be regarded only as steps towards the church, where the rich and poor should meet together, and it is comely to see them meet together, and their meeting is good for both. I need not dwell now on the many advantages which both may thus receive. I may simply say that I thoroughly

agree with the remark of last year's Bampton Lecturer, that "in one sense the poor have more need of what is beautiful and true in church architecture than the rich, who are satiated with grandeur in every form;" \* for, as he goes on to observe, his church may be to the poor man almost the only beautiful thing with which he is familiar, and may greatly tend, by the influence of its beauty, to aid the preacher in his lessons, and quietly, in its own way, to refine and civilize.

I vindicate, then, on these grounds, the application of art to the adornment of the house of God. And, in doing so, I am not aware that I am at all departing from Presbyterian principles. It is sometimes thought by Episcopalians that there is something in the very essence of Presbyterianism that does not admit of any regard being paid to the beauty and seemliness of either our places or our forms of devotion. To hear some of them, they possess, you would imagine, a monopoly of æsthetic feeling and artistic taste. As for us; our forefathers, at the time of the Reformation, were gloomy and austere fanatics, who shamefully destroyed the most beautiful monuments of ecclesiastical antiquity; and we in the present day are supposed still to

\* Bampton Lectures for 1861—Lecture VII.

share in their ideas, at all events so far as to look with indifference, or rather with positive disapprobation, on what may be called the refinements of worship.

Now, as regards the present day, this is simply not the case. Whatever feeling there may ever have existed of the kind referred to, not only is fast passing away, but in great measure has already passed away. If proof is asked, you have only to consider how munificently the decoration of our own Church has been provided for, and what satisfaction it gives to the entire community that the work has been undertaken and so far carried out. It is also to be remembered that all denominations of Christians in Scotland have recently been shewing activity and zeal in the same or a similar direction.

As regards our ancestors at the time of the Reformation, it is taken for granted far too readily that they were the destroyers of churches they are constantly described to have been. If any one will take the trouble to examine the evidence upon the subject, it will probably be a surprise to him to find how very little ground there is comparatively for so severe and sweeping charges as have been made.

Take the case of this very building. It is said, and very generally believed, that Andrew Melville

recommended that this Church should be pulled down in order to erect smaller churches with the materials, and that the desecration would have been consummated but for the resistance of the craftsmen of the city. There are many contemporary records, but, strange to tell, there is not the slightest mention of this, or allusion to it, in any of them. The first mention of it is in a work written some half century afterwards by one who had little kindness to the Presbyterian party.\* His is absolutely the sole testimony on which the story rests. Contemporary records not only do not contain it, but in the minutes of the Kirk Session and Town Council of the time, there is proof that anxious care was taken to uphold the fabric. According to one of the best authorities on the history of that period,† the ground of the story seems to have been, that a proposal was made to

\* Archbishop Spottiswoode.

† Dr M'Crie, "Life of Melville," page 39, Edit. 1856. See also Note Q, same volume, where the original authorities are given. While there seems to be no sufficient evidence that the Reformers wished to destroy the Cathedral, the citizens of Glasgow may still claim the credit of having been the means of preserving that venerable and beautiful monument of antiquity by the liberality with which they contributed for its reparation. See Minute of Town Council quoted by M'Crie, and printed also in "Burgh Records of

take down and remove the tower at the west end of the building, which, strangely enough, was actually taken down not long ago, as not belonging to the original Church, but being merely a comparatively modern and altogether incongruous addition. It appears to have been proposed that this tower should be taken down with a view to use the materials in making certain repairs. For some reason, the proposal was resisted by the craftsmen; and this, thinks Dr M'Crie, is the foundation of the whole legend.

The truth is, Scotland was a poor country, and there never was in it, even proportionately to its size, anything like the same number of large and important churches as in the southern division of the island. Of those which did exist, some unquestionably were destroyed by the Reformers. In Scotland, as in England, monastic buildings especially were not spared. The "First Book of Discipline,"\* how-

Glasgow" (Maitland Club). In Wodrow's "Life of David Weems" (likewise one of the Maitland Club publications), many extracts are given from the ancient Session Records, shewing that great anxiety was felt not only for the upholding, but also for the "beautifying and decoring" of the Metropolitan Kirk of Glasgow. See said publication, page 9, and onwards.

\* Chapter III.

ever, expressly contemplated the upholding of all such Cathedral and conventual Churches as were likewise Parish Churches. About the same date, when orders were given by the civil authorities to destroy the images and remove the altars used in the Popish service, there was a strict injunction added, (certainly in some cases and probably in all,) that no harm should be done to glass-work, or iron-work, to stall, or door, or window. In 1571 the General Assembly (John Knox being a member,) appointed certain parties to negotiate with the Regent as to the "preservation and upholding" of the Kirk of Glasgow;\* and in after years an equal solicitude was repeatedly shewn both as regards Glasgow and other places. These facts, and many more which might be mentioned, shew the feeling of the leaders of the Reformation; though there need be little wonder that, in such a time of excitement, the violence of the mob and other causes should sometimes have led to excesses for which the Reformers, as a body, were not to blame,—excesses involving, as at St Andrews, the destruction not only of images, but of the buildings which contained them. More churches than were destroyed at the Reformation were destroyed by an English army which invaded Scotland some time

\* Calderwood, vol. iii., page 41 (Wodrow Society Edition).

previous to that event.\* Several also were destroyed at a later period by the Puritans under Cromwell. But of all the causes of our noblest churches falling into ruin, the greatest have been, the want of a provision of funds set apart for their suitable maintenance, and the neglect and devastation permitted long after the Reformation; down, indeed, to the beginning almost of the present century, when the most beautiful remains of noble ecclesiastical houses were allowed to be used as a quarry for building private residences and even garden walls.

While, however, it must thus be confessed that there was a period when ecclesiastical taste had sunk in Scotland to a very low ebb, we were probably, even then, not much worse than our neighbours. I have noted from the Bampton Lecture of last year the following passage:—"No one denies that the condition of our parish churches in the early part of last century was most dis-

\* *e.g.*, Jedburgh, Kelso, Melrose, Newbattle, Holyrood, etc., all which were destroyed by King Henry the Eighth's army, under the Marquis of Hertford, in 1543. See Robertson, Tytler, and other historians of the period.

On the whole of this subject, see a most interesting article in the *Quarterly Review*, vol. lxxxv., said to be by a writer of the highest authority in Scottish history and antiquities.

M'Crie's "Life of Knox," Note G, Period Fifth, may also be consulted.



creditable to us as a people." The lecturer also cites as follows from Archdeacon Hare:—"If there can be anything meaner, more graceless, more spiritless, than the theology of the last century, it is its churches. And, not content with its own inability to produce anything excellent, that century was restlessly busy in spoiling what it had inherited from its ancestors. One can hardly enter an old church without being saddened and shamed at seeing how it has been disfigured by repairs and alterations dictated by the parsimonious ignorance of these times."

I have made these remarks because, I think, it is really of some importance that we should not allow ourselves to believe that there is anything in the nature of Presbyterianism which necessitates baldness and coldness in respect of the externals of religion. You may say, very truly, that I have been rather dealing with history than preaching the gospel. Perhaps, however, I may be pardoned in consideration of the occasion. And I may add, it is a religious lesson which all that has been said enforces,—namely, that Episcopalians and Presbyterians had better not recriminate, but both should be thankful for advancing civilization; and, neither being perfect as yet with regard either to

inward devotion or outward helps thereunto, both should be open to consider improvements, and adopt them, if, when considered, they approve themselves as real.

Having said thus much—a great deal more than I intended when I began—with respect to places of worship, I may now be permitted, before concluding, to offer a few remarks on the kindred subject of forms of worship, particularly as regards church music and prayer.

With regard to church music, every one knows that the question is coming to be more and more entertained every day, whether it would not be an improvement to make use of the help of instruments.

There seems to be no good reason why this should not be done. Under the ancient Jewish dispensation the harp, the timbrel, and other instruments of music, were used in the service of God; and there seems to be nothing in New Testament principles to forbid our making use, in like manner, of such instrumental aid to the voice as may be suitable to the habits and associations of the present day. There are many instruments, certainly, which one would hardly like to hear in church service; our associations being such that the use of them is not

in the meantime, and is not likely soon to become, appropriately suggestive of reverent ideas. There is one instrument, however, against which this objection does not lie,—I mean the organ. And I do not hesitate to say in public, what I have often said, and heard many of my brethren say, in private, that there appears to be no reason why such congregations as may wish it, should not be permitted to employ this help to the voice. The matter is not so important as to be worth division in congregations; but should any congregation desire it, with a near approach to unanimity, it seems only consistent with a reasonable liberty that they should be allowed to gratify their wish. It were a great pity, indeed, were music to be introduced of such an elaborate and difficult character, as to prevent the people from joining freely in that beautiful and impressive portion of public worship. But it is on every account desirable that the plain and solemn music, suitable for public service, should be performed as well as possible, and the moderate use of instrumental aid may, as is well known, conduce much to this end.

As regards prayer, there are two points to which the public mind is a good deal directed just now. The one is the question of attitude; the other is the

question of a liturgy. As to attitude,—the theology of the question is, that the devotion of the heart being of course the great thing to be considered, the outward attitudes of prayer mentioned in the Bible are various. And the history of the question is, that in the primitive church, though they knelt at prayer on other days, they stood on the first day of the week, because the first day of the week commemorates the resurrection, and the attitude of standing upright expresses the joy and good hope with which that blessed event ought to be kept in mind by the faithful. I do not think, however, that we are bound by the example of the primitive church in this particular. There is no command nor invariable precedent on the subject to be found in the New Testament; and the practice of standing at prayer on Sunday was certainly given up at an early period. The matter seems to be one in which it is fairly within the liberty of the church to adopt the practice which may be most reverent and decorous; and, for my own part, though I do not propose anything at present, but merely submit the subject to your minds, I think that the attitude of kneeling would be an improvement on that which is at present most customary in this country. It is the attitude we adopt in private prayer, as being the

most reverent; and it is the attitude we can best preserve for the necessary length of time, and in which we can best concentrate our thoughts, and be free from outward distractions. By recent decisions our church has wisely allowed liberty in this particular.

And now, lastly, as to the use of a liturgy. It would be a great pity and a great loss were the liberty of free prayer to be withdrawn; but I have before stated from this pulpit more fully than I can do now, that, in my judgment, the reasons in favour of a partial liturgy are quite unanswerable. It seems an evil, certainly, that, in respect of what is so solemn and important as the expression of their feelings and desires before God, a congregation should be entirely at the mercy of a man who may be narrow-minded or unsympathising, or deficient in sense or taste, or perhaps, however generally well fitted for the duty, not at the time in a frame of mind for happy utterance. Very beautiful devotional expressions may sometimes indeed flow unpremeditated from the heart; but it can hardly be denied that, as a rule, our public prayers, in order to be really good—that is to say, connected, well expressed and solemn, as well as suitable to the wants of an assembled body of men—would require

to be at least as carefully prepared as the sermon. It seems hard to understand why it should be thought more necessary to study carefully beforehand the words we are to address to our fellow-creatures than those we are to address to our Maker. And I may add that if this anxious preparation is requisite, and that, too, in a kind of composition which all men of taste and sensibility find very difficult, two sermons a-week, and four or six prayers, are more than any ordinary man can continue to produce.

If it be objected that the use of a form of prayer may degenerate into formalism; it may, but it is not much more likely to do so than the use of free prayer. In point of fact, what is called free or extemporaneous prayer is often in reality nothing else than a form, which, with more or less of purpose, the minister has come to use habitually with little alteration. As respects the people, on the other hand, I think it is often very useful, and comforting, and helpful to enable one really to enter into the prayers in which he is joining, when he can anticipate the language that is to be used in uttering those feelings and desires, of so many of which it may be said that they are ever old, yet ever new. Besides it is to be remembered

that I am arguing only for the partial, not for the exclusive, use of forms.

If it be objected that the repetition of the same prayers day after day would become wearisome; they need not be the same prayers; there might be a variety, to be used either in a certain order of succession, or as the minister might select.

If it be objected that the use of forms of prayer does not allow of that adaptation to varying circumstances which is admitted by free prayer; I repeat what has been said already, there is no necessity that we should be confined to forms alone. It is a mistake to argue the question as between free prayer and forms. There could easily be some arrangement which would admit of both.

Having the same right with all our fellow-Christians to that very valuable part of the church's inheritance, which consists of the recorded devotional utterances of good men from the earliest days, I cannot doubt that, by selecting from this storehouse, it might be possible to compile a Presbyterian service, which would not fall behind that of any other church in spirituality of feeling, in beauty of expression, and in many-sided adaptation to the emotions and necessities of the heart. It is true that such a compilation, even though made from the treasures of the

past, would not at first be felt to have the same ancient associations clustering around it, as in the case of some other liturgies compiled long ago ; but while it might avoid some at least of their imperfections, the influence of association would be added by time.

And now, my friends, I have done. I can hardly say that I have preached this morning an eminently gospel sermon, but I have stated to you honestly and plainly the best opinion I am able to form on certain matters of some interest—matters closely connected with religion—matters which are much in the public mind, and on which it is, I think, quite consistent with his duty, that a Christian minister should expound his ideas from the pulpit. I can only again plead the occasion as my apology for the line of observation I have followed, should any one still consider that an apology is required.



## XX.

### MARTHA AND MARY; OR, RELIGIOUS DIVERSITIES.

#### A SERMON.

JOHN xi. 20—"Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him; but Mary sat still in the house."

YOU can sometimes say, on looking at the picture even of a person you have never seen, *that* must be a likeness. Something of this kind is the case as regards the picture of Martha and Mary in the Gospels. There is a certain appearance of truthfulness about it which makes us feel sure it must have been drawn from the life. It is not worked out in detail. It is produced simply by a few suggestive strokes. Still it is characteristic, natural, and telling. One seems almost to have known the two sisters. Excellent people, both of them; but very different. The one more objective; the other more subjective. The one more practical; the other more contemplative. The one more active and bustling, and perhaps of greater use in an

emergency; the other more retiring, and perhaps more sweet. The one more occupied with household and hospitable cares; the other more disposed to live in a world of her own thoughts. We can quite understand the kind of difference between them,—a difference that would reveal itself in manner, appearance, dress, possibly even in occasional little drynesses or quarrels, but which might consist at bottom with a very real and a very affectionate sisterly love.

You remember the incident recorded by St Luke, when our Lord had occasion to censure Martha for the cross and peevish way in which she spoke of her sister. Herself occupied with her household duties, she complained of Mary for leaving her to perform them alone, that she might sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His conversation. Our Lord replied,—“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken from her.” Not that Martha was a worldly-minded woman. There is no reason to think so. But the contrary. We are told that Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus,—Martha being named, and not Mary, as if to prevent misconception in regard to her

character. It is also observable that she is usually named first, as if in some sense the most important person in the house. Perhaps she was the elder sister, probably by much the elder. She seems to have taken the chief charge and management of the domestic affairs; and we may be well assured that the house in which our Lord delighted to seek a brief shelter, from time to time, from the cares and troubles of His public life, would not be one so cold and ungenial as that must always be which is presided over by a worldly-minded woman. It was not, then, that Martha was worldly-minded; it could not be that she was wrong in attending to domestic duties; but she failed, for the moment, to make due allowance for the difference in nature between her sister and herself, and so suffered herself to lose temper and speak hastily.

It is just the same difference which comes out in the text in another way. Bereavement had fallen upon the house at Bethany. Lazarus had died. Our Lord was coming to visit the family after this affliction, and when the sisters heard of His arrival, Martha went out to meet Him, but Mary sat still in the house. Not that Mary had less regard for Him, or faith in Him; it was not for this reason that she sat still in the house. Not that Martha felt less the

recent death of her brother, nor that she had a greater desire to do honour to our Lord; it was not for either of these reasons that she went out to meet Him. All we can say is, that the two sisters were of different dispositions, and, therefore, though both of them had a true sisterly love for their departed brother, and both were attached disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, they acted in different ways.

On which circumstance I mean to found the remark that religious feeling may be expected to manifest itself differently in the case of different individuals.

For what is religious feeling? It is just natural feeling directed to religious objects. When a man is brought under the power of religion, it is not in virtue of any new faculty created in his mind, whether intellectual or emotional. Only the old faculties are directed to new objects. Trust in God is not different in kind from trust in an earthly parent; only the object is different and higher. Faith in Jesus Christ is not different in kind from confidence in an earthly benefactor; only the object is different and higher. When one begins to feel the influence of the cross constraining him to crucify the sins which crucified his Saviour, it may be to

him a new influence, but it operates only on the old capacity of grateful love, which is part of the constitution of all human beings. The power of the world to come may be to one's consciousness a new power; but still it operates only on the old endowments, and though there are new objects to be followed after, and new ends to be gained, one can only pursue them by means of the same faculties which were formerly employed about inferior things.

Now this being so, it is nothing more than might be expected that religious feeling should manifest itself differently in different people. Some are more demonstrative; others more reticent. Some are more ready to express their feelings by words or other outward signs; others are more disposed to a quieter and less direct method. Look at the case of grief for the dead. You would be quite wrong if you imagined that because some people shed fewer tears than others therefore they had less love for their departed friend, or were more likely soon to forget him. Not so. We all know that it is not so. Some people like to talk a great deal about their departed friends; like to relate all the circumstances of their last illness; like to tell how good they were, and how much they loved them. Other people will hardly allude to the subject; it is more their way

to keep their feelings within their own breasts. But, notwithstanding, their sorrow may not be the less real or the less deep. The memory of their friend may not be the less lasting. In short, you must not judge. You must just remember that different people have different ways.

It must be the same in religion on the principle already stated. And it were well that this were kept in mind a great deal more than it is, for it would teach us to be much more charitable. The influence of Divine grace does not enable us to get over the faults of our character all at once, but only by degrees; and, in the case of one man, a great amount of self-denial and self-government may be required ere he attain to proficiency in some particular virtue which to another of a different disposition may be comparatively easy. It is easy, for instance, for some to be meek and gentle; for others to be firm and resolute. The softer nature may find it difficult to educate itself into proper resolution; the harder to mollify itself into proper gentleness. Each may partially fail (we do not know with how much regret to himself) in that in which he is weakest; and yet each may have striven anxiously—more anxiously than his neighbour can understand—against the deficiencies he has not been able wholly to

overcome. Each, therefore, should judge the other with great leniency.

Revivalists, again—to take another example of a different kind, and others of that way of thinking—are apt sometimes to talk as if people of a less emotional, more intellectual class, who do not feel so vividly, or at least who do not express their feelings so vividly, in reference to religious matters, were, of necessity, if not positively godless, at least cold and languid in their Christianity. While, on the other hand, people of the latter class shew some inclination often, not only to disparage the more demonstrative style of religion which approves itself to the former, but even to throw doubts upon its sincerity. For my own part, I am inclined to believe that what has always hitherto been found to be the case will continue to be found hereafter,—namely, that movements like those we are accustomed to call revivals will generally make most way among the uneducated, or, at any rate, the unreflective; while among those of greater culture, and more in the habit of being guided by the understanding, the progress of religion may be expected to be quieter, and its presence to be manifested in a more regular and a quieter form. Charity, therefore, ought to be displayed on both

sides. There is room for it on both sides; and in this, as in most other instances, the judgment that is most consistent with charity is probably also most consistent with justice. Of course, no man of sense could defend for a moment the absurd excesses by which revivals have been too often accompanied. Neither, on the other hand, can any man of Christian principle be the advocate of that religious coldness which sometimes accompanies education. But between the two extremes there is a wide territory to be embraced in the judgment of love.

But not only may religious feeling be expected to manifest itself differently in the case of different individuals;—we may expect a similar difference in the case of different races and of different ages of the world. The scene described in the sixth chapter of second Samuel, when David danced before the ark of the Lord, could not be repeated now, at least in the Western world; nor anything like it. The old Jews, to express sorrow for their sins, tore their garments and threw dust upon their heads. The like expressions of the same feeling would be absurd among us. With the changes that take place in the progress of years, and with the diversities of the habits of different countries, there must be varieties of religious forms;—and one of the marks of that



Divine wisdom everywhere conspicuous in the New Testament, is to be found in the fact, that although it was the composition of Jews accustomed from their youth to a fixed ritual, the very few ceremonies which it enjoins are of the simplest kind; and are not prescribed in any detail like those of the Old Dispensation; but room is left for a free development of the religious life, outwardly as well as inwardly, among all the nations of the world, to all of whom the universal gospel was to be preached.

If we look at the different portions of this island of Great Britain in which we live, there are diversities among ourselves which might be referred to in farther illustration of the subject. Speaking generally, it is not to be expected that an Englishman and a Scotchman will manifest religious feeling in the same way; nor therefore, of course, is it to be demanded that they should. Our Southern neighbours are not said to be very demonstrative, but still they are more ready to speak out their religious emotions—to open, as it were, the book of their hearts in the view of the public—than we of the cautious North. So far as my own experience goes, and speaking, of course, only generally and with exceptions, when a Scotchman is very ready to unfold his religious feelings to a

stranger, there is *prima facie* reason for a little suspicion about his sincerity. He may discuss sometimes readily enough his religious *opinions*, but very few Scotchmen indeed, who have lived chiefly in their own country, are inclined to enter with a stranger into the more sacred region of emotion and experience. We should be wrong, however, if we judged that because our neighbours are more willing to do so than we are, their piety has less depth. On the other hand, I hope *they* would be wrong were they to imagine that we of the North have little feeling on the subject because we say little about it, or that, since we are more willing to discuss opinions than to unfold experience, our Scotch religion is only a branch of our Scotch metaphysics.

To advance a step farther still in the same direction in which our subject has been leading us;—it is not only in their way of shewing religious feeling that we may expect people to differ; we may expect them to differ likewise in the tone and character of their religious views. Assuming that all which is necessary to salvation is revealed in Holy Scripture, yet people's interpretation of the Scripture, and their ways of conceiving of the grand and profound subjects with which the Scripture deals,

must necessarily be affected by their degrees of intelligence, by their general cultivation, by their views of philosophy, by their mental and moral idiosyncrasies, by the modes of thought congenial to the race to which they belong or current in the time in which they live. You cannot expect, therefore, that the Church of France, let us say, should agree in every particular with the Church of England, or the Church of England with the Church of Scotland, or the church of a given century with the church of another given century. There may be—there must be in all true churches—certain features of agreement,—as, for example, in regard to the Fatherhood of God, the forgiveness of sins through the merits and intercession of Jesus Christ, and the agency of the Holy Spirit in awakening good thoughts and promoting the sanctification of the soul. But it is equally true that, along with this agreement, there may, and must, be variety in the details of developed opinion, as well as in forms and other minor things. Even in Roman Catholic times, when the whole of Western Europe professed ecclesiastical allegiance to one head, not only were there wide diversities among individual saints and doctors as to many important matters of faith, but there were always characteristic differences of one kind or another between the churches

of the different nationalities, such as the Spanish, the Gallican, the Anglican. And as to forms and services; even within the same country, and at the very period when the rules of ecclesiastical subordination were strictest, each Bishop had a degree of liberty to introduce variations as he might judge for good. I may mention, as an illustration of this, that the form of service used in the Church of Salisbury, or the "Use of Sarum," as it was called,—a form which was adopted before the Reformation in this very Cathedral of Glasgow where we are accustomed to worship, as well as widely throughout Scotland and England,—was originally arranged by one of the Bishops of Salisbury for his own diocese, and gradually obtained acceptance in other places, simply as being found well fitted for the purpose for which it was designed.\*

Thus, there have always been diversities of religious expression in the case of different individuals and of different peoples. And thus it always must be till we reach a perfect state. Nor is this a mere truism. It needs to be remembered, for many practical reasons. It teaches us a lesson of humility and forbearance. It teaches us to respect the opinions of other men, while forming

\* See Note, page 217.

and holding our own. I may add, that there is something we may learn from it in regard to missionary enterprise. You can never make a Hindoo exactly like a Scotch Presbyterian or an English Episcopalian. A Scotch Presbyterian or an English Episcopalian is the product, not simply of the Bible, but of the Bible as read in the light of Scotch or English traditions, and understood in the light of Scotch or English opinions and habits of thought. Now, you cannot make a Hindoo the same. You cannot expect to make him the same. You cannot give him a British nature, or British antecedents. You must expect that he will see things more or less differently from you, and therefore you must not contemplate transferring your own ideas, in your own forms, to the soil of Hindostan; but you must be content with seeking to inculcate a broader and simpler Christianity, leaving it to develop itself in detail according to the peculiarities of the Oriental mind. I am not sure that there is much hope of our ever being able to transfer the theology, I do not say of this country in particular, but of Western Europe, to the soil of the East. I am sure there *is* hope of our being able to implant Christianity there, for Christianity is true, and good

for all men. But Christianity is a larger and wider word than the theology or the Church government of Western Europe; and I am not certain but one cause which has hindered its dissemination may be, that we have not sufficiently seen this, and that we have therefore dwelt too much upon peculiarities of doctrine, and told too little the grand simple story of our Redeemer, and of the manifestation of God in Him, leaving those to whom we spoke to reason out for themselves their own theory about it.

In point of fact, the theology of Western Europe is chiefly derived from the Epistles of St Paul. No one can doubt this who looks at its character and at its history. There is a great difference, however, between St Paul and St John. Not at all a contrariety, but yet a great difference. The writings of St John are extremely different from those of St Paul. His way of looking at things is different. The questions which seem to have occurred to him are different. Election, grace, faith, so prominent in the writings of St Paul, have always been the subjects of interest with the logical mind of the West, of which St Paul is in a way the representative. They have always supplied the field on which the great battles of Western theology have been

fought. On the other hand, the Incarnation, the relations between the Father and the Son, and the mysteries of the Divine Being, are the subjects of interest with St John, as they always have been with the speculative rather than logical mind of the Oriental churches. May it not be that it is St John's type of thought, rather than St Paul's, which is destined to take hold of the Orientals again, to engage their attention, and obtain their assent? At any rate, it stands to reason that we need not hope to transfer to the Eastern world a Church cut and squared exactly after any Western pattern, any more than we might hope that the oak of Britain would flourish in a climate fitted for the palm. I hardly think that these ideas have occurred sufficiently to those who have been seeking to Christianize India. They are not latitudinarian ideas. I do not mean to say it is of no importance what our detailed opinions may be. I do not mean to say that Scripture may be held to teach anything anybody likes. But I do mean to say that its truths are so large and many-sided, and each man so incapable of seeing every side of them, that, however we may value our own interpretation, we should always remember that our religion is greater than we are, and may shew to others what *we* have

not discovered, just as it may shew to *us* what *they* do not behold. If this liberal view were taken, and we were content, in preaching to the heathen, to keep, more than perhaps has been generally done, to the broader and simpler facts of our holy faith, I believe its progress would be greater than has been the case under most of the modern Protestant missions.

But I have gone away, you may think, very far from the text. I come back again, in conclusion, to say these two things:—

First of all, as the manifestations of religious feeling may be expected to be different in different persons, let us judge charitably.

And, secondly, let us remember that though there may be varieties among Christians, yet no one can be a Christian indeed who does not bear some fruit to the praise of God's glory. Mary was different from Martha, but each had in her heart a sincere attachment to our Lord Jesus Christ, and shewed it in her own way. Let no one, therefore, judge his neighbour; but if any of us know in our own souls that we are living in the spirit of self and sin, let us not imagine that either worldliness or indifference can possibly be considered a phase of Christianity. However we may differ in the way



of expressing it, God give us all a true and hearty love to Himself, and guide us how best to shew it according to our nature.

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#### NOTE.

Bingham, in his "*Origines Ecclesiasticæ*," ii. 6, 2, has the following remark:—"Though there was but one form of worship throughout the whole Church as to what concerns the substance of Christian worship, yet every Bishop was at liberty to form his own liturgy in what method and words he thought proper, only keeping to the analogy of faith and sound doctrine." Of this remark he proceeds to give examples. See also Palmer's *Origines Liturgicæ*.

Bede tells us (H. E. 1. 27) that Gregory advised Augustine, the Apostle of England, not to follow the Roman office strictly, but to compile from any quarter what might be suitable for the English people; "choosing," said the Pope, "from every Church such things as are pious, to which when compiled into one the minds of the English may be accustomed." It is curious to find this precedent for liberty so near the commencement of the Christian history of our island, and set, too, by one who was so strict an upholder of Church order as Gregory the Great.

The "Use of Sarum" was framed by Osmond, Bishop of Salisbury, about the middle of the eleventh century, from a compilation (says Dr Hook) of "new prayers and offices," which he found "abounding everywhere"—new, that is, as compared with the liturgy of Augustine, above referred to. The differences between the mediæval "Uses," such as those of Sarum, York, Hereford, Lincoln, Bangor, Aberdeen,

etc., seem, no doubt, to have been small. Nevertheless, there *were* differences. There *was* a liberty. In earlier times the diversities were in all probability, or indeed certainly, much wider.

The "Use of Sarum" was adopted in Glasgow by Bishop Herbert about the middle of the twelfth century.

For some interesting observations on the above subject see Laing's "Preface to the Aberdeen Breviary."

## XXI.

### CHRISTIAN UNITY.

EPHESIANS iv. 13—"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

IT is a great pity that our translators have not put into the text the translation of one of the words in this passage which they have consigned to the margin. The margin reads, "Till we all come"—not "in," but—"into the unity of the faith." And there is no doubt whatever that this is the correct rendering. It is in the original the same preposition that is repeated throughout the verse at the beginning of each clause—the preposition that means in English, not "in," but "into," or "unto," and which is so given in all the clauses except the first, in which, for some reason, our translators have made a change, not only uncalled for and inconsistent, but which injures the meaning of the passage. The verse should run—"Till we all come into (or unto)

the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

Now this is not a barren observation. It is by no means a mere critical punctilio. It opens up a different view of the meaning of the verse, and leads to interesting reflections, as well as in some respects to grave questions. The Apostle is speaking of the different gifts bestowed on different individuals in the church, and he is telling us what the result is, to which, under God's blessing, the use of these different gifts may be expected to lead. One part of that result he states to be that we shall come at length into the unity of the faith. As his words stand in the English version, they would seem to mean that we were to begin with the unity of the faith, and, in that unity, to pass on unto the perfect man. But such is not the meaning really. It was not at the beginning, but at the end, of the church's history, that the Apostle looked for the unity in question; not in the meantime; not in our present imperfect state; but *along with* the perfect man, or as a thing to be realised only when we shall come unto the perfect man; a thing to be hoped for only as a final consequence of the stirring up, by the various members of Christ's body, of the

grace given them. It was, in brief, as an end of the dispensation of which he was a minister that he anticipated this unity; not in the course of it, but as one of its results. He pleaded, indeed, for a unity of the Spirit which might be maintained amid all differences of opinion, and which we should ever most anxiously seek to preserve. He exhorts us in the third verse of this very chapter to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” But the unity of the faith comprehends more than the unity of the Spirit; and, in the Apostle’s expectation, it was only to be looked for as a result of free inquiry and honest difference; a final blessing, to come at length out of the diversities and discussions of many previous ages; an ultimate good, not to be attained save as the end and fruit of thought and progress. Unity of the Spirit in the meantime—a unity, that is, of honest purpose and exalted aim—a unity of mutual kindness and love to one another,—unity of the Spirit in the meantime,—this the Apostle counselled. But unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God he looked for only in the end.

An absolute unity of the faith seems, for obvious reasons, unattainable in our present condition. We differ from one another so much in constitution and

education, are exposed to the influence of such different circumstances, are so incapable of looking at all sides of any large question, and see what we do see so incorrectly and through such a haze of prejudice and passion, that, however honestly we may try to discover and to hold the truth, we are sure to form ideas as to what the truth is, which shall vary to a certain extent, in the case not only of different races and nations, and not only of different ages of the world, but indeed of every individual man. It is possible to imagine the unity of a dead submission to external authority. But it is not possible, so long as we continue in our present weak and sinful state, that there can be such a thing as an absolute and unbroken unity of living thought. Throughout all nature, where there is life there is diversity. You may cut a thousand stones or pieces of wood into the same shape. But the living trees of the forest are all different. And so with living thought. When the minds of men are really occupied with any subject—are really anxious about it—are really desirous to discover the truth concerning it,—it is certain that they will arrive at judgments which will not be identical, which will not even be conformed to one type, but which will differ from one another in a

certain degree. The more honestly and the more anxiously the subject is considered, the more certain it is that these diversities will appear. And only after they have shewn themselves, and have been ventilated and discussed,—only then at length does any unity emerge that can be regarded as worthy of the name. How does opinion take shape upon any matter whatever? How does it become settled into harmonious conviction, except as a result of the discussion, and examination, and turning over and over of diverse ideas? And is there any other way in which a reasonable man will look for ultimate unity as regards the great and deep questions involved in the Christian faith? It is true there is a guidance of the Spirit of God which is granted to humble inquirers into Divine things. But the Spirit operates on and in the mind according to the laws of the mind itself; to quicken thought, not to compress it; to call it into life, and feed and sustain it; leaving it, for the rest, to grow diversely; just as all other living things, though all getting their life from the fountain of life in God, and all sustained by the same Heavenly bounty, are permitted to grow diversely, and to assume and display each its own peculiarities.

The Roman Catholics tell us that there is a ground of unity in the existence of a visible church on earth, having for its head, from age to age, the successors of St Peter, who are infallibly directed in the functions of their office by the Spirit of God. There is, they say, a ground of unity here. There may be, perhaps, of outward unity, but not of any unity which is worth calling a unity of the faith. It is not worth calling a unity of the faith, when men yield merely an external submission to an authority they are afraid to question, or when they add an ignorant Amen to doctrines they do not search into like rational beings. Nothing affords better proof that a real unity of the faith is not to be built on the foundation of the Papacy, than the well-known fact, that, whenever men have reflected for themselves, differences of opinion have arisen within the pale of the Church of Rome no less than elsewhere, so that in the history of Romish theology we may find a variety of views probably as great as could be pointed out in the history of Protestantism. In one respect the Romanists have had the better of us;—among them, so long as a general adherence was preserved to what they consider fundamentals, diversities of sentiment on minor particulars have not so readily led to outward separation.



There is no ground, then, in an outward church authority of any kind on which a unity can rest that is more than outward also. But, it may be said, we have the Bible. We have in the Holy Scriptures a full and sufficient revelation of the will of God for our salvation; and is there not a ground of unity in this? The real truth is,—we can have an absolute unity of the faith on the ground of a book, even an inspired book, no more than we can have it on the ground of church authority. The book is there,—yes; but what is in the book?—that is the question. What does the book say? What does the book teach? What is the meaning of it? If these questions are not to be open, there might be a unity indeed, but it would not be in the least better in principle than the unity of the Papacy; it would be unintelligent; it would be dead. On the other hand, if they are to be open, diversities of opinion immediately arise and must arise; people will not all put the same interpretation upon the same passages; they will differ in the force which they assign to the same words; looking with different eyes, they will see the same Gospels and the same Epistles in different aspects; there will be diversities of sentiment as surely as there are diversities of men. There must be so, for these

plain reasons: first, that none of us has a mind large enough to see any truth in all its aspects and bearings; and, next, that we can never see anything at all except through the more or less distorting medium of our own peculiarities.

But do we not read in this very chapter of one faith and one church? Are we not told that "there is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"? The Apostle here explicitly speaks of one faith, and how, then, it may be asked, can a unity of the faith be pronounced impossible? how should we be told that we cannot expect to attain to it in our present condition? The explanation is easy. Only just remember that there are two meanings of the word faith. There are more than two meanings, indeed, in which it is to be found employed in Scripture. But there are two we may remember at present. Sometimes it is used to mean the thing *to be believed*, the faith objectively; sometimes it means rather the thing *that is believed*, the faith subjectively. Now, the thing to be believed is one. There is an absolute truth, independent of all human opinions, and above all human opinions, and the

same to every man; not made by our opinions, but to which our opinions are to be conformed. Whether we believe it or not, it is still the truth. Our opinions do not create it, nor can they alter it. It exists before our opinions, and is not affected by them. Whether we see it or are blind to it; whether we discern it more clearly or less clearly; however our views of it may be distorted by our own perversities and passions; however, in the folly of our hearts, we may even count it superstition and error, there is a truth external to ourselves, independent of ourselves, superior to ourselves, everlasting and unchangeable. This is the thing to be believed,—the faith objectively. But though the thing to be believed is one, the thing that is believed is diverse. One side is seen by one man, and another by another, according to our various dispositions and our various education, our various imperfections and our various infirmities. We shall arrive at the unity of the faith, in the sense of the Apostle, just when at length we are so set free from our imperfections and infirmities, that what we do believe and what we ought to believe shall coincide—that we shall see aright the objects presented to us—that we shall behold them with the same eyes, being all of us conformed to the same image, and

so shall be of one mind as well as of one heart, united in belief as well as in charity. Meanwhile the great things for us to hold fast are these two,—first, that there is a truth above ourselves and independent of ourselves, which our opinions do not create, but to which, by God's help, they are to be adapted as far as we can. Holding this, there is an object before us, after which we are to strive; we are saved from the forlorn feeling that all is uncertainty and fluctuation; we have ground to plant our foot upon, and we can see a possibility of progress. The second thing is, that the truth is greater than we are, that none of us is able to see it fully, and that all of us are liable to have our views distorted by our passions and our sins. Remembering this, we shall perceive the excellence of those three cognate virtues,—in which God give us grace that we may largely abound,—humility, liberality, and forbearance.

There is one faith, then, in a very high sense of that expression. There is also one church. It is true we are split up into many denominations. It is also true that there is far too much among us of unchristian envy and jealousy, and we are sadly unskilful in the godly art of provoking one another to love and good works. Still the church is one.

It is one in the view of God. Brothers and sisters may quarrel. It is a pity they should. It may be a great sin. But brothers and sisters may be at variance; they may think differently from one another; they may even feel bitterly towards one another. Still they are brothers and sisters. They cannot help *that*. It cannot be otherwise, whatever their feelings. They are brothers and sisters by birth, and they cannot annihilate the relationship. It exists in spite of them. Possibly, too, though at variance with one another, they may all and each have a love for their father. It cannot be a perfect love, else they would seek to be reconciled to one another also, knowing that their variances among themselves cause grief to their father's heart. Still, in a measure they may love their father; and if they do love their father, it will draw them to one another some day. Does not this analogy throw some light upon the subject? Christians may differ among themselves, and may even feel bitterly towards one another. It is a necessity that they should do the first more or less. It is a pity and a shame, but it is a fact, that they do the second often. Still in God's sight they are brethren. They cannot help it. They may not be willing to allow it, but it is the case. Under diversities of opinion, even under

alienation of feeling, there may be a common partaking in the new life; and they who partake in that life, although, in the imperfection of their faculties, they may differ in their judgment as to many points, and although, under the influence of that sinful nature which is never wholly subdued in any man here below, they may even wrangle and strive wrathfully, are nevertheless brethren—brethren by the new birth of the soul—brethren who will come to see one day how their strifes have grieved the Common Father—brethren who will be drawn to one another more and more, the more they are drawn to Him whose children they all are. It is thus, I believe, we shall meet at last. It is thus, I believe, we shall meet soonest. We may try to adjust our theological opinions till we all come to think the same thing;—it will be long ere we can meet on that ground. We may try to come to an understanding upon questions of ecclesiastical polity and forms of Church government;—on that ground, too, it will be long ere we come to stand together. I doubt if we shall do so till we behold the King Himself seated on His throne in the heavens. The quickest way to meet, as I believe, is not so much by seeking to approach one another along the outward rim of the circle, as by striving, each from his own point,

towards the One Centre—towards the heart of God. Every step in that direction is a step towards unity. As the radii converge to the centre, they approach more nearly among themselves.

It is true, and I do not wish to leave it out of sight, that an outward and visible unity is very much to be desired. Sadly, indeed, is there occasion to regret the present divided state of the church. It weakens us extremely. It impedes, to a lamentable degree, the progress of Christ's kingdom both at home and abroad. I repeat, then, that an outward and visible unity is much to be desired. But if a scheme of comprehension is asked for, by means of which it is likely to be attained practically, a question is put far more difficult than I can pretend to answer. I suppose it is not in the least probable that we shall go back to the ground of the Romanists, and submit to a visible head in the person of the Pope. As little is it likely that universal assent will be soon given to the High Church theory of the Episcopate. If it be urged that, in order to church unity, there must be adherence to a common creed; it is certainly difficult to see how there can well be a church without articles in which its members are understood to concur. But when the question comes, What shall the creed be that is to unite Christians?

who will undertake to give it a satisfactory reply? It is a growing and apparently a well-founded opinion that our creeds have frequently been too minute, descending too much into details, and seeking to limit thought upon points, on which, not only without impropriety, but with advantage, it might have been left unfettered. But this is a fact of the past; and how these creeds could be now altered opens a problem of extreme difficulty. It is easy to say that the points in which we agree are far more important than those in which we differ; and that we might be content with unity in fundamentals. But who is to decide what *are* fundamentals? Who is to judge what shall be fixed upon as fundamentals, so as to secure a general concurrence; and what shall be excluded as non-fundamentals? I believe that these are questions for an answer to which we are not yet prepared. I believe that an answer to them is only to be looked for through the growth of an intelligent, and thoughtful, and freely-formed Christian public opinion. And this is why, though one cannot venture to propound a scheme of comprehension, such reflections as we have been engaged with may not be wholly in vain. For how shall such a public opinion be arrived at, unless as we and others turn our minds



to these topics, and try to learn liberality and love?

If there is any justice in the thoughts I have thus endeavoured briefly to submit, they lead us to take a hopeful view of the ultimate result of those diversities of sentiment that prevail in the Christian world. For animosity of spirit, for bitterness in disputation, for anger and reviling directed against those who may disagree with us, no apology can be offered. These are unchristian feelings; clearly, unmistakably, intensely unchristian. Against them we should ever watch with caution and pray with earnestness. At the same time, it is pleasing, and it is reasonable, to believe that the honest differences of honest men, which are inevitable wherever living thought exists, will lead to a happy issue. It is thus that truth will be sifted; that it will be disencumbered of the errors and prejudices of the individual mind, and brought out at length in its purity by the general mind of the church. If God has given us rational faculties, it is surely His will that we should freely use them, as on other subjects, so on that which is the most important of all. If Christianity is truth, why should it fear the freest investigation? And if anything like real unity is ever to be looked for, how else is it to be attained?

There is no hope of real unity in any other way. There is hope in this. There is hope in the case of Christian doctrine, as in every other case, that candid discussion, though it must develope difference, will yet in the end lead to consent. We need not, therefore, look on the divided state of the Church as altogether an unmingled evil,—certainly not on the present remarkable prevalence of an inquiring spirit in the theological world. Enmity of Christian against Christian;—that is an evil. Uncharitable imputations of godless motives; harsh denials of one another's sincerity;—these are evils much to be deprecated. But the diversities of honest judgment are not evils, but rather the necessary concomitants of a fruitful search after truth. It is thus that one mind corrects another; and we may hope in the end to attain to ideas which will be truer and larger than we could ever have individually arrived at,—ideas which shall represent the mind of the race.

So, then, let each man be in earnest to know and hold fast the truth as thought and prayer may reveal it to him. Let each man be glad of any light he can obtain from a neighbour's judgment. Let no man deny a brother, because of difference of sentiment, the credit of sincerity. Let all men remember that the truth is greater than any man.

Reverently, therefore, and lovingly towards all others who have the same ambition, let each man seek to discern it and receive it into his heart. And thus we may cherish the expectation, that notwithstanding, and even by means of, our present diversities, we shall come at length

“To where beyond these voices there is peace.”

## XXII.

### PROGRESS.

MATTHEW xiii. 52—"Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

BUT can there be any new things in religion?

Some people answer no, very emphatically. Some people answer no, not only very emphatically, but with objurgations against those who are disposed to answer yes. To think that there can be anything new in Christianity, appears to them not only unfounded, but highly dangerous and almost profane,—next door, in fact, to infidelity. It looks a kind of treason against the Bible. 'Do you mean to tell us,' it is asked, 'that the Bible does not contain all that is necessary to salvation? Is the Bible an incomplete book? Was the revelation given by Christ and His Apostles an insufficient revelation? Does it need to be supplemented? Must we add to it and eke it out? If the Bible is not an incomplete revelation,

‘if Christ and His Apostles were not insufficient teachers, how can there be anything new in ‘Christianity?’ Views like these are urged not unfrequently with vehemence, and sometimes in language which would seem to imply, and even occasionally goes the length of expressing, a doubt whether those who hold an opposite opinion can justly be considered Christians at all.

Let us look at the matter for a moment calmly.

One may hold that all things necessary to salvation are contained in the Bible, and yet he may surely hold also that more light may be thrown on the meaning of the Bible. As a Christian grows in intelligence and spirituality, he comes to see new light as to Divine things. Nor is anything more remarkable in connection with the Scriptures than that singular richness of meaning, in virtue of which one is continually finding, on every renewed perusal, a new significancy, often in the very passages with which he thought himself most familiar. May not what is thus true of the individual be also true of the race? May it not be true, that as men bestow more thought on Christian subjects, and as they advance in all kinds of relative knowledge and culture, the Church may progress just as the individual progresses; may ob-

tain a deeper insight; may penetrate more beneath the letter of revelation; may advance in spiritual understanding, so as to discern new wealth in the Divine treasure-house, and bring out new wealth from it?

Look at the natural sciences. It might be said that all scientific truth has been written from the beginning in the book of nature, so that even in the sciences there can, in one sense, be nothing new. No truth can be discovered but what has been written all along in the volume of creation. Yes; but to us that, and that only, is truth which we are able to read. And our ability to read improves. How wonderfully men have improved in reading the book of nature! Is it not possible that men may improve also in reading the Scriptures?

Language is used sometimes which would seem to imply that it is doing dishonour to the Bible to suppose that there can be anything new in Christianity. It seems rather, upon the other hand, that, instead of doing dishonour to the Bible, the views now indicated do it the greatest honour. It is something very different surely from doing dishonour to the Bible, if one is of opinion that there is more in it than has been drawn out of it

yet by all the inquiry and research of the bygone ages,—treasures, out of which the ages to come may ever obtain new wealth for new occasions. The view which really does dishonour to the Bible would seem to be that which supposes that its meaning has been so thoroughly exhausted, and so perfectly summed up, in the creeds, the articles, and the confessions of former days, that no progress of human intelligence, no advance in general culture, no application of more searching methods of inquiry, can ever lead to any modification in any respect of the mind of the Church.

But take not only these reasonings. Look at the statements of the Bible itself. Before leaving the world, our Lord gave to His disciples the memorable promise, that when the Spirit of truth was come, He would guide them into all the truth. Was that promise exhausted when the Spirit was given to those in whose hearing it was at first made? Was it exhausted by the communication of His Divine influence to them only? Certainly not. The promise of the Spirit was not such a narrow promise as this. It was a promise to the whole Church, and for all time. It stands among a series of promises which have been looked upon by the Church in all ages as among her most valuable

possessions. Surely we are not to suppose that the Spirit has ceased to be given now, or that He no longer exercises the function of guiding to the truth. And if He is given, and if He continues to exercise that function, may we not expect, as the result under His direction of reverent thought, that the mind of the Church will become more and more enlightened, better and better acquainted with the mind of God?

It is not meant that the guidance of the Spirit bestowed on the authors of the New Testament can no way be distinguished, either in degree or kind, from that which is given to good men generally. Nor is it meant that we are to look for the communication from above of new facts, at least until the Lord shall appear again to inaugurate a new dispensation. That alone is meant which has been said;—namely, that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, blessing and directing the thought of the Church, we may expect new light as to the meaning and force of the old facts, according as the minds of men are opened and knowledge is enlarged.

It is matter of thankfulness that even a small degree of knowledge may be blessed to the salvation of the soul. While undoubtedly it is, for many important reasons, a great advantage to possess



large Christian enlightenment, even a little may be used sparingly; for our salvation depends chiefly, not on the amount of what we know, but on our faith and earnestness. Before the coming of our Lord, a degree of knowledge relative to the method of Divine grace, much inferior to that which is open now to the humblest Christian, was blessed to the salvation of many who lived faithfully according to the light which they had. And equally in our day there may be a reality and vigour of spiritual life in one who knows hardly any other book than his Bible, as well as in the ablest critic or the most intelligent and sagacious thinker. Nothing that has been said as to progress in the knowledge of God's will at all implies that former generations of Christians, or those in the present generation who may not possess the advantages of high education, were, or are, without abundantly enough of the means of grace to secure their welfare, if used in a sincere and devout spirit.

It *does* imply, however, that our Christian position becomes in some important particulars all the more favourable as the ages roll on;—to be of which opinion is simply to believe what our Lord said when He told His disciples, “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I

depart, I will send him unto you." Although it is doubtless true that a small degree of knowledge may be so used as to secure our salvation, yet, as the Holy Spirit accomplishes His work, and the truth is brought out more clearly in the consciousness of the Church, we ought to start upon our Christian progress, as it were from a higher level, and with larger and more comprehensive ideas. Whoever makes any really open-minded study of theological matters, will be heartily grateful for the large inheritance bequeathed to us by the wisdom of the past; but he will, at the same time, perceive with equal clearness, both that there are things in the Sacred Volume which are better understood now than in former times,\* and, also, that there is much which still remains to exercise the Christian reason of the Church in future generations. †

\* *e.g.*, The principles of toleration, in which, however, we have still much to learn.

† *e.g.*, The connection between Christ and the Church, as illustrated in the parable of the vine and the branches, and referred to in such sayings as that of St Paul, "Yet not I, but Christ in me." So in Christian morals, what great need there is for deeper insight in regard both to the glory of self-sacrifice, and to the excellence and legitimate extent and operation of brotherly love, as contrasted with the selfishness so influential in social and political economy!

Our imagination is apt to look back to the primitive days of the Church as the purest and happiest in its history. But in the primitive centuries there was a great admixture of Jewish narrowness and Pagan superstition, which it took long to expel, and by which both Christian thought and Christian life were greatly hindered and distorted. In the earliest productions of Christian literature which have come down to us, there is much we cannot but look upon with affectionate respect; but when we compare them with the New Testament, nothing can be more striking than the singular contrast in point of force and grasp of idea, as well as of almost every other literary quality, between the writings of the Apostles and those of their earliest followers and commentators. One might liken them to the writings of men as contrasted with the essays of school-boys; and indeed the contrast is so great as almost of itself to prove that the Apostles wrote under the peculiar guidance of the Holy Ghost. The progress of the Church since then has not been a steady and uniform advancement, but rather, as it has been said, like the progress of the tide upon the beach, rising by flux and reflux. There have been periods of reflux, not merely seeming, but real, when

Christian thought and life have gone backwards. But still there has been progress on the whole; and if the condition of Christian literature can be taken as a test of the Christian position of any given age, there never was a period, in this country at least, when, on the whole, it gave better indications than it does now. No doubt there is much scepticism in some quarters and much narrowness in others; but scepticism claims to be reverent, narrowness is obliged to imitate the language of charity, and even declared irreligion is compelled to be decent. The Scriptures are read and commented upon with a degree of earnest application of mind which may be surpassed in the future, but has not been in the past; and people of sincere intention had never at their hand better helps for knowing the revealed will of God. Much remains for the thought and the prayers of those who are to come after us; but in many important respects, we have opportunities above our fathers. May God give us grace to use them, so that we may well meet the responsibility which they imply!

We believe, then, that there is a depth of wisdom in the Christian revelation which has not yet been altogether fathomed. We should not only say so in declamatory terms when speaking of the excellence of

the Word of God, and then forget it when we come to deal with the opinions of those who are venturing to think and search for themselves. But we should *believe* it. It is absurd to say at one time that the Word of God is inexhaustible, and then to speak at another time as if it had been exhausted by the creeds and other formulas of the Church. A real belief in the inexhaustibleness of Scripture should lead us rather to sympathise with every earnest and reverent attempt to draw out of this well of salvation with such longer cords and larger vessels as growing intelligence and culture are fitted to supply.

In holding these views as to progress, it is far from being implied that there is not, at the same time, a certain rational conservatism which ought also to be maintained. There is a conservatism so narrow and bigoted, and with such unreasoning veneration for what is old merely because it is old, that it would maintain even errors and abuses simply because they are venerable. On the other hand, there is a liberalism so conceited and self-sufficient, that, despising the wisdom of the past, it is ready to adopt any new and untried crotchet or dream. It is thus in politics. It is thus in theology. Between the two there is a happy mean where we should try to take up our position. Our fathers were not fools;

on the contrary, they were men of no little learning as well as of great earnestness. It is, therefore, a very arrogant conceit alone that will cast away an old belief or mode of thought without grave and prolonged consideration. On the other hand, our fathers were not omniscient, nor were they free from the prejudices and errors of the days in which they lived, and therefore it were a somewhat superstitious reverence were we, for their sakes, to shut our eyes to whatever increasing light may come with the general advancement of knowledge and civilization.

Such remarks as these seem not inapplicable to the present time. There is a great deal of thought and discussion just now on theological subjects, and the two tendencies we have been speaking of—namely, the liberal and the conservative—are pretty strongly displaying themselves. It is very important that thoughtful people should try to strike, if they can, the happy medium. An ultra-conservatism will never succeed in confining the thought of the day within the precise track marked out by the footprints of former generations. It will succeed least of all if it deal too freely in the methods of denunciation or prosecution. By these methods it will only exasperate the spirit which it seeks to quell, and make it a spirit,

not merely of inquiry, but of innovation, and possibly revolution. Such would be its certain effect. On the contrary, an ultra-liberalism would be equally injurious and equally inconsistent with true reason; for there is, doubtless, a respect that is due to the judgment of our ancestors; and, while refusing to be trammelled by their sentiments, it were arrogant, and therefore silly, to deny them a proper degree, not merely of nominal, but of real, regard. Novelty, for the sake of novelty, is just as foolish a principle as antiquity for the sake of antiquity. No one, indeed, will profess either. But what people do not profess, they may unconsciously be guided by. And in the present case, all true thinkers will try consciously to repudiate both. The grand principles to go upon are charity and faith,—such a faith, I mean, in God, as does not fear the results of any honest and open-hearted searching into any of His works or dispensations, so long as it is conducted in the humble spirit which becomes His creatures. Followed in this spirit, we may cherish the assured hope that the truth will be attained to more and more, that errors and prejudices will gradually disappear, and a growing light will shine to guide us and to make us glad.

There is a oneness in human nature. There is a oneness in its wants and necessities. There is a oneness in the great questions relative to our relations to the Almighty, which are suggested by that sense of sin and infirmity which is common to all earnest minds. This is why all earnest thought of one mind may be of interest and use to other minds. This is why all earnest thought of an age bygone may be of interest and use to the age that is. At the same time, every age has its own peculiarities, by which its own thought must be modified. It has its own questionings and its own answers to them. We ought not to fear these questionings; nor need we hope to be able always to settle the inquiries of the present by the answers of the past. Thoughts that were apposite at one time, and in one set of circumstances, become less suitable to the wants of another period; and views that once were living lose their vitality. A mere repetition of old formulas will not supply the needs of the day that is; though yet, when used not as formulas merely, but as incidents in the history of the human mind, they may help us to arrive at that which will meet our own wants. Let us respect old formulas, but let there be added living thought. Some of the seed which the sower sowed



fell upon a beaten track, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. It is possible that the beaten track may be a track that has been beaten by the very feet of the sower himself. So it is possible that dead repetition of things once living may deprive them of all, or nearly all, their power of growth and fertility. Therefore there is need that even old truths should be presented from new points of view, and that any new light should be welcomed. There is need, in short, for a way of thinking that is not hard and stereotyped, but open to the influence of progress,—open to the calls and suggestions of the time. There is need for a theology which, while it respects the past, shall not refuse the light which the present can supply; and, while it venerates the old paths, shall not be content with merely going over them again and again, as if mechanically in a circle.

It does not fall within the scope of the present papers to enter upon questions of controversy, and therefore I confine myself at present simply to indicating the spirit in which, as it appears to me, the religious questions of the day ought to be approached. It were folly to cast loose in haste from all our old anchorages; but it were equal folly so to hold fast to our traditions as to shut our

minds against any progress whatever. The greatest folly of all is to be afraid for the truth, or to imagine that it can be in any danger from free inquiry.

## XXIII.

### UNBELIEF AND FAITH.

MARK ix. 24—"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

FROM the class of subjects with which we have been occupied in the last few papers, let us return for a little to that more inward religious life to which these counsels are intended chiefly to refer.

What a strange blending there often is in the human heart of unbelief and faith! Or rather, for it is hardly a blending, what a singular co-existence of the two,—dwelling together, but not being agreed,—nay, rather on the contrary, fighting against each other continually, and leading—according as the one or the other is victorious—either to rest in God's bosom or else into the outer darkness!

There is, for example, an instinct of prayer. When the ship crashes on the sunken rock, or the train, thrown off the line, is dashing onward to destruction, I fancy there is hardly a seaman or a passenger who will not say in his heart, "The Lord

have mercy on my soul." And yet how many of these may have been utterly careless hitherto,—how many may have been infidels,—how many scoffers and profane persons! It is thus that a certain belief comes up through the prevailing unbelief; the instinct of prayer reveals itself, and tells its tale of that deep, hidden, quenchless sense of God and immortality, which bears such striking witness to our nature and our destinies, and cannot be extinguished altogether, either by the thoughtlessness of the neglectful, or by the positive efforts of those who, because of their sinfulness, would fain forget.

But this which we have looked at is a broad example. It brings before us, in vivid contrast, on the one hand, that instinctive belief which finds expression in a cry to God; and, on the other, the habitual neglect or profanity, out of the midst of which the prayer comes, like a flash of lightning out of a dark and murky sky. There is not always such a contrast as this. In many cases, belief and unbelief mix themselves up together in a strange, and inconsistent, and indescribable way; and what presents itself to our observation, or our consciousness, is not the lightning flash from out of midnight, but the mingling up

of light and darkness to be seen in a December mist, or the war of cloud and sunshine on an April day.

For instance, how uncomfortably, or even painfully, an element of unbelief often mingles with our worship, and that when we are most desirous to worship devoutly! We are not without a certain faith in God, through Jesus Christ our Lord; we can say so as in the presence of the Searcher of Hearts; we are not hypocrites, nor insensible, nor formalists; we have a real wish to hold communion with our Father in heaven. Still, somehow, there is a strange mixture of doubt and hesitation with our faith. We believe in a merciful Father. We so believe as to turn towards the door of His house. We so believe as to knock at the door. But, somehow, we do not so believe as to cast ourselves into His arms when He comes out to meet us. We do not so believe as to receive His gracious offers as freely as He makes them. We believe, but with a hesitancy which keeps us back from the fulness of gospel blessing; and while we thank God for the degree of faith He has given us, there is nothing we more need to ask than that it may please Him to deliver us from that mixture of unbelief which still remains,

and which prevents us from enjoying, in all its richness, His great bounty towards our souls.

Another very noticeable illustration of the same thing is to be found in the fact, that very often we have little real expectation that our prayers will be answered. We have faith enough to pray, and even to pray with a degree of earnestness, but very little real belief that we need look practically for the things for which we petition. We ask, it may be, for restored health; but how very little we realise often that there is any chance of such a prayer being answered by God's blessing upon the means used, and not simply through the means themselves! Or, we are in some difficulty of a temporal kind, and we ask the Lord to deliver us out of it; but how faint is our persuasion that deliverance must come truly from the Lord, and not from our own contrivance or our own energy alone! Even in the case of spiritual blessings, our attitude is often much the same. We ask for the increase in our hearts of meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, charity. But how constantly we fail to look for an answer to these requests where we ought to look for it,—namely, in the use of the discipline to which our Father is subjecting us in that great school of the world in which He has placed us,

for our training in these and other virtues! I know nothing on which a Christian minister has more need to give counsel to those who are disposed to hear him than on this point to which I have now referred. Let us be attentive to the duty of prayer;—it is an important direction. But it is equally important to add;—let us live as if we expected that our prayers will be answered;—wherein are implied, among other things, first, that we shew a hopeful trust in God's providence; and, secondly, that we look for an answer in God's daily dealings.

Truly, the answer to our prayers is often at our hand, though we see it not. So little real faith have we, that in many cases we should feel surprised were we to get what we have sought for; and in many cases more we do not get it, because, not expecting it, we do not look for it; and so miss it, though it be at our hand. In regard to temporal blessings, of course we can only ask them aright, when we ask them under the condition and upon the understanding that we desire them to be given or withheld according as it seems best to God's wisdom. But we have an absolute promise, that in asking for spiritual blessings our prayers will be answered. And I believe that that promise

is always fulfilled. I believe that as often as we pray for the increase of a spiritual grace, God always puts the answer within our reach,—only we miss it often from not expecting it and watching for it. If we ask for more faith, or hope, or charity, I believe we should always find,—did we really look for an answer, and remember where we ought to look for it,—the means towards our growth in these graces placed around us in abundance. We have faith enough to pray. O for faith enough thus to believe that our prayers will be heard, and for the wisdom to improve God's gracious discipline which such a faith would teach us!

The poet compares prayer to the inarticulate crying

“Of children crying in the night,  
And with no language but a cry.”

As regards some kinds of prayer, the comparison is good. There are inarticulate yearnings of the soul, when it does not ask for any blessing in particular, and when indeed it does not know exactly what blessing it requires, or from whom to ask it. Of these the poet's simile is beautifully descriptive; and they are real prayers; and whencesoever they come,—from whatever depth, it may be even of heathendom,—doubtless God will regard them as



real prayers, and answer them as such. But, granting they are real prayers, it does not follow that prayer need never amount to anything more than an inarticulate yearning. It is good that we should know of a Father in heaven, to whom we may direct our requests, not merely as under some vague impression of a power above ourselves, but as those who are looking up to a Personal God whom they have learned, in Christ, to trust and love. And it is good, also, that we should arrive at something more practical than an inarticulate sense of sin and misery—a vague discomfort. It is good that we should know our wants, so as to spread them out from time to time at the footstool of a throne of grace, if with the simplicity of children, also with the understanding of men.

And if we consider what our wants are, I am sure there is nothing we ought to ask for more earnestly than for the increase of our faith. Suppose that we are suffering under any outward burden, what we need far more, and what would do us far more good, than the removal of the burden, is faith to bear it as long as God sees necessary, and so to bear it that we shall be strengthened. If our troubles are of a more inward and spiritual kind, arising from the sense of guilt, the sense of weak-

ness, the slowness of our progress in the Divine life, or any other similar cause; what we need is more faith, to see more clearly the loving face of the great God, even our Saviour, and to feel more deeply the constraining power of the love of Christ. This growth in faith is the way to growing peace and joy. And it will be when our faith is at length cleansed from every vestige of unbelief that our peace and joy will be made perfect. For how shall we realise, in the city which hath foundations, that perfection of blessedness which is there promised, except as we have a perfect faith that nothing shall ever enter which can hurt or destroy,—that nothing shall mar the light and gladness of the place,—but its sun shall no more go down, and the days of our mourning are ended?

## XXIV.

### UNREST AND REST.

PSALM lv. 6—"Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

'NAY, but, O Psalmist, thou wouldst carry thine own  
'unrest with thee; the dove-wings might bear thee,  
'according to thy prayer, away from the "violence  
'and strife" thou hast seen in the city, and the  
'"guile" and the "deceit" which depart not from  
'her streets; away from the troubles which surround  
'thy throne; away from the labyrinth of politics,  
'and the factions of politicians; away from the  
'opposition of thine enemies, and the treachery of  
'thy pretended friends; away into the wilderness,  
'among the silent hills thou so lovest to remember,  
'where thou didst tend the flocks in the quiet years  
'long ago;—but thou wouldst carry thine unrest  
'with thee; thou wouldst carry it in thy heart; ay,  
'even though the dove-wings were to bear thee, not  
'back to peaceful Bethlehem alone, but up to the  
'very gates of heaven.'

We are told by the philosophers that what we call the colour of objects is, strictly speaking, not in the objects, but in the mind of the observer. The greenness of a meadow, or the azure of the sky, is not in the meadow or in the sky, but in the mind of him who sees it; it is a mental sensation, not a material quality. So the philosophers tell us by way of metaphysical paradox. How true the same thing often is in another department! We think that our frequent mental unrest arises from the circumstances in which we are placed; when we carry its cause in our own bosoms.

I am sure every one can sympathise more or less with the feeling of the Psalmist. Some can do so very deeply. All, I am sure, can do so more or less. How often, when unhappy, we have thought within ourselves that if only we were somewhere else than we are, or in some other circumstances, our unhappiness would disappear; all would be bright; we should be satisfied and restful! When suffering from pain, we think we should be so much better, if we were only able to assume a new attitude; were it but to turn, or be turned, in our bed. That poor consumptive girl;—she would be well again, if only the spring were come, and she could be taken to the country, and might gather spring-

flowers there. Alas! you can hear in her cough, and see in her eye, that the spring-flowers will bloom beside her grave.

And the same is the case much less innocently in things of a moral character. ‘If I were only in another position than that in which I am, I should be so much less tempted; I should be so much more able to lead a right life; I should increase so much in spiritual-mindedness; I should become so much a better Christian.’

How easy we find it, when regrets arise over the past, to quiet them down by referring our errors and our shortcomings to some fault of our position; and when aspirations spring up for the future, to excuse ourselves from acting upon them by the vain hope, that, in some new circumstances, which are to emerge by and by, we shall find ourselves so much more happily placed than we now are, that we shall be borne upwards into a right condition almost without our own endeavour, or, at any rate, that our endeavours will be made with far greater prospect of success! Somewhere else; some other time; our hopes and aspirations lie always there.

“Somewhere else.” The ruined would repair his fortune; the shattered constitution would regain strength; the shattered reputation would be re-

trieved; lost opportunities would be made up for; disappointed ambitions would be realised; the gloom upon the spirits would be dispelled; the mistakes of life would be rectified, and its sorrows changed into gladness;—if we were only somewhere else. “Somewhere else” is the paradise of fools.

“Some other time.” When we are a little older, when we are settled in life, when we have made a little, and are able to retire;—we will then apply ourselves more earnestly to the things which belong to our peace; we shall then be in a state to make it more a business, and to set our minds to it with greater concentration. Who is not often fixing dates in advance when he is to begin a higher life? “Some other time” is the golden age of the slothful.

“Some other time” is the golden age of the slothful, and “somewhere else” the paradise of the foolish. It is true; but yet we must not press it too much. There is no good in exaggeration and unreality, and it would be exaggeration and unreality were it to be said that circumstances matter nothing at all to our happiness and welfare. There *is* some real relief when the sick man is turned in his bed; there *is* some real good to the health and the spirits in change of scene and occupation; and,

if we come to moral things, there *are* circumstances which are more favourable than others to the growth or preservation of character. It is a great blessing to have been brought up among people of respectability, rather than in some den of wickedness, and who would say that it is all the same as to one's chances of a good life, whether he has been trained in a religious home, or has had the lot of his unhappy youth cast among thieves and profligates? Doubtless there is not a little to affect our destiny in the circumstances we are placed in, and to say anything else, were to run away with a sentiment, which, properly limited, is just and to be remembered,—namely, that circumstances *by themselves* can neither secure our well-being nor destroy it; but that one great and chief cause, whether of satisfaction or unrest, must ever lie within our own bosoms.

All human feelings, which are natural and universal, have in them a basis of good and of utility. Even those which seem to be deceptive, will appear, upon consideration, to be entitled to this praise. Indeed, as has been pointed out by a late famous preacher, we are led on through life very much by a series of illusions, or what, in one point of view, might seem to be such; while yet, notwith-

standing, there is or may be a progress which is neither illusive nor unprofitable. A nurse wiling on a child gets him now to chase this butterfly, now to run this little race, now to be the first to pull that flower, now to be the first to touch that gate. Each object in succession is in itself trifling; each object being attained does not satisfy, and is not intended to satisfy; but the child is wiled on from point to point, and he gets home at last as little tired as may be. There is a series of illusions; but yet there is an object being gained all the time, which is not illusory. The child gets exercise and the benefits of exercise, and the way is made pleasant and shortened. It is so in the wider field of life. We are to be happy somewhere else than where we are; we are to find satisfaction in some other circumstances. Doubtless we shall be disappointed in some respects. When the student's course is over and he becomes a preacher, he may be disappointed to find that he is not moving the world as he had fondly hoped. When he has preached for twenty years, he may be disappointed to find that his work has been, in its results, so much more commonplace than he had thought, and that he himself is so much more ignorant than he had imagined. When the man of business has made his



fortune, he hardly finds it such delight as he had supposed. When the artizan whose trade has failed him at home, emigrates to Australia or California, it may prove a change for the better, but he has hardly discovered yet the seat of the garden of Eden. Thus we are ever disappointed. But still we are wiled on. Were it not for hopes of something better in another position, enterprise would die, and the river of human history would stagnate. What we pursue, looked at as regards its real value, may be only an empty bauble; but there may be good in the pursuit there is not in the thing; it may strengthen the limbs and confirm the health; it may give energy and vigour to the whole frame, whether bodily, or mental, or moral.

And then there is more than this still. There is a deeper meaning of our frequent unrest. It is not merely that we are to be wiled forward; it is not merely that we may get mental and moral strength from the pursuit of objects, which, in themselves, are earthly and fleeting; but our restless wish for some change seems also to indicate that there is a state in which we are, and which really needs to be changed;—a state out of which an escape is really necessary; nay, truly, a very matter of life and death. We must fly away out of our sel-

fishness and pride; out of our unbelief and hardness of heart; out of our self-conceit and self-righteousness; out of our perversity and ingratitude; in a word, out of our ungodliness. There needs a change. And a change in our circumstances might be so far good; generally, however, much less than we imagine. But there needs, above all, a change in ourselves; a deliverance from our own sin; a passing out from the spirit of alienation which separates us from our Father in heaven, and an entering into the spirit of sonship. This is what we need in order to our true rest.

There was One who descended on our Lord in the likeness of a dove, and dwelt upon Him; even the blessed Spirit of the Most High God. This Spirit coming down on us also, and working in us the likeness of our Lord's faith and love,—this Spirit quickening our hearts, and helping us to live to God,—this Spirit saving us from ourselves by His powerful inworking, and raising us up into the fellowship of Christ's love and of Christ's sacrifice,—this Spirit, by thus delivering us from self-confidence, and self-assertion, and self-seeking, and leading us to God in humble penitence and faith,—this Spirit is the Giver of Rest; the Comforter. And the faith which He produces in the soul, the

meekness, the dependent frame, the self-forgetfulness, the charity,—these are the dove-wings on which alone we can soar away truly and for ever into the realms of peace.

Let us remember the words of Him who ever liveth to bestow His Spirit upon them who ask Him—how He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Come unto me”—this implies that we must come out of ourselves. Yes, truly, for how different are we from Him! Self-seeking, impatient, prone to harsh judgments, prone to envy and uncharitableness, fond of our own pleasure, wrapped up in our own selfish aims and interests; how different from Him in whom were embodied self-denial, and patience, and love, and godliness! Truly we must come out of ourselves in order to come to Him: we must take the dove-wings and fly away.

And then we shall have rest. Not were the dove-wings to carry us far from the worldly cares with which perhaps we are oppressed; not were they to carry us to any fairest Bethlehem-plains of our imagination, where the sun is shining the most brightly, and the birds are singing the most cheerily, and all around is happiest. But if they shall carry us into the bosom of God; if they shall carry us

away up out of our sins, our worldly-mindedness, our selfishness, into a nearer fellowship with our adorable Redeemer, and into a warmer sympathy with His righteousness and love; then are we rising towards the land of peace, and we shall find rest unto our souls.

## XXV.

### RESIGNATION.

PSALM xxxix. 9—“I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.”

RESIGNATION is a silent grace. Yet she speaketh by silence: by silence she praiseth: and by silence she doth worship. The silence of resignation proclaimeth the victory of faith. It is melodious as church-music in the ear of God; yea, it praiseth above anthems, and is louder than hosannas. God heareth the voices of the heart, and when the heart is too full for speech, it saith, by the silence of resignation, “Our Father which art in Heaven.” Resignation hideth her face in the bosom of God, and wipeth away her tears with the hem of His garment. She claspeth, as it were, and holdeth, and silently presseth the Father’s hand, and so doth greatly magnify the Father’s love.

Resignation hath frequent occasions. For the sorrows of life are many. “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble: he cometh

forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." And, again, it is written, "Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." It little becometh us indeed to forget or undervalue the manifold mercies of Almighty God. But to no man doth He grant an unmingled cup. There is no life without its trials. There is no pathway through the world without its hills of difficulty, and its valleys of humiliation and of the shadow of death. Resignation, therefore, hath frequent occasions.

Resignation hath many hindrances. It is a grace whereof the commendation is easy, but the practice hard. It is easy for him who is walking in the sunshine to say to his brother who is walking in the cloud, 'Have patience, brother, God is merciful;' it is not so easy to receive the saying. It is easy for those whom the Lord is causing to lie down among the green pastures, to praise the name of the Lord; it is not so easy for those whom He is leading by the way of the wilderness. Yet is *their* praise the best because of the very obstacles with which the faith that renders it has to contend. There may be a higher adoration in the hymns of Baca than in the hallelu-

jahs of the temple. Yea, even with closed lips, resignation doth give glory to God.

Resignation hath hindrances arising from natural affection. And with these it is comfortable to think that our Father in Heaven, and our elder Brother in Heaven, do certainly sympathise. God is Love. God created man after His own image. God, who is Love, in creating man after His own image, put into His breast certain tender affections to resemble and reveal the love wherewith He loveth all. Never can it be pleasing to God that these affections should be repressed. Human loves, whereby we cling to one another, help the soul upwards toward the comprehension of the Divine love; and as the ivy, when it ceaseth to cling to the wall, ceaseth also to climb towards Heaven, so when the tendrils of the soul become dry and dead, and adhere no longer to the human beings to whom they ought to bind us, the soul doth lose one chief means whereby it may ascend to the knowledge of the Highest. But these same human affections, which have this use and glory, do also sometimes hinder resignation. It is hard, for example, and painful to be thought of,—that long separation of the grave. It is hard to shake hands for that long parting. It is hard, and *He* knows it who put our human loves into our

hearts, and *He* too knows it who wept with the sisters of Bethany at the tomb of Lazarus. Resignation, therefore, is to be distinguished from want of feeling. She weepeth, though she doth not murmur. The tears drop to the ground, though the eye from which they fall looketh upward to the Heavens. This is resignation,—to grieve without complaining, and to sorrow without distrust.

Again, resignation hath hindrances arising from our human short-sightedness, and most imperfect discernment of the tendencies and results of God's dealings. God is great, and His plans are far reaching; yea, it requireth eternity to develop the counsels of the infinite wisdom of the Most High. Of the ways of the Almighty we can see but a little, and even that little only dimly and partially,—and dimly then, more than at other times, when we look through a mist of weeping. Often we cannot see whither He is leading us; and when our path lies through the desert in the meantime, it is hard to believe that it conducteth to Canaan at last.

Again, resignation hath hindrances arising from our worldly-minded estimate of things. Because of our infirmity, we often cannot see that trouble may be the path to blessing; but we are doubly blind, when, because of our carnality, we mistake what



blessing is. Frequently we cannot see, not so much because it is dark, as because our standing-point is so low. In very numerous cases, resignation would be easier did we feel more that strength, and patience, and purity, and elevation of spirit, are better than money, and health, and troops of friends. If this were felt as it ought to be, there would be only one loss under which resignation would be impossible,—not the loss of worldly blessings, but the loss from within the soul itself of any feature of that Divine image whereby it doth constitute the Sheckinah of God in the temple of the world. It becometh us to be resigned to all things but sin.

Resignation, then, hath many enemies, over whom she proclaimeth her victory, not by the noise of words, but by the reverent silence wherein she doth meekly bow before Almighty God.

As she hath many enemies, so hath she also many weapons to contend against them withal.

Whoever is in any trouble or affliction, whether of mind or body, whether in family or estate, ought to consider, first, the manifold goodness he hath experienced in past times at the hands of his Creator and Preserver. There is not a man upon the earth but his blessings have been greater than

his merits, while his sorrows are less than his sins.

Whoever is in any trouble or affliction will do well to remember, further, that he is only subject to the common lot of humanity. The Lord is not dealing with him in an exceptional manner, but as He hath ever dealt with all His children. It is written, "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons."

Whoever is in any trouble or affliction ought to keep in mind, besides, that God doth often bring good out of evil in unexpected ways. Hardly any one can have lived in the world for any considerable number of years without having had experience of this in his own history. Wherefore let us not make haste to say, 'The night hath closed down for ever,' when so many nights by-past have been succeeded by the morning.

Whoever is in any trouble may reflect again, how the heart of every man doth bear witness that we stand in need of such discipline. Towards our moral health, towards the preservation of humility, towards the maintaining of sympathy with one another, as well as many other important results that might be named, we require warnings and reminders from time to time. It is known to our own hearts

that we are apt to become proud, and selfish, and self-sufficient, forgetful of our Maker, and of eternity; and whoever is in any trouble may profitably listen to the testimony which his own conscience thus beareth, that he is not beyond the need of those humbling but salutary lessons of affliction, which it is one of the real blessings of life that God addresseth to us all, at such seasons, and in such measure, as seemeth right to His infinite wisdom.

Furthermore, as hath been hinted already, it may also with great advantage be kept in view, as a help towards resignation, that the fortitude, the patience, the sympathy, the right-heartedness towards God and one another, which may be educated in the school of sorrow, are better, and higher, and worthier things than the temporal and earthly enjoyments of which affliction may deprive us. Were we alive to the value of these things, it would conduce very powerfully to make us submissive under our trials. Were it clear to us, and were it felt by us as deeply as it should be, that the growth of Christian graces in the soul is the best and most precious blessing by which life can be enriched, we should be in a position, not merely to believe without difficulty that good *may* come out of evil hereafter, but to *possess ourselves of it* as

coming out of evil *now*. Were the fruits of righteousness what we chiefly cared for, we should be better able to bear with equanimity what, we should then perceive, conduces so directly to our greatest good, as does that Divine husbandry which the Psalmist describeth, when he saith of his afflictions, "The plowers ploughed upon me, and drew long their furrows."

Once more, resignation hath promises to rest upon, exceeding great, and exceeding precious. It is written that the Lord "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," but "chasteneth whom He loveth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth," and this not for His pleasure, but "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." Let him who is in any trouble consider these things. If his worldly means have been snatched from his possession; let him remember what is written concerning the treasures that are incorruptible and everlasting. If the second and severer trial of the ancient patriarch come upon him, and the Lord "touch his bone and his flesh;" let him bear in mind the saying of St James, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Should the bed upon which he is laid be

one from which he somehow secretly knows he will never rise again; when he feels it is the hand of the last enemy that hath touched him, and when he hears not far away the roar of the dark stream of the river of death, let his trustful piety recall the words, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee." Or if it be for a departed friend that he doth mourn; let him bow his head and worship with thanksgiving, while He listeneth to the testimony of the Spirit, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

Finally, let him who is in trouble consider, chiefly of all, how "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In the Cross of our Redeemer there is a proof of the Divine loving-kindness so bright and full of demonstration, that whoever doth devoutly reflect thereupon may be well assured, even when the Lord's dispensations are the darkest, that mercy presideth over them all. We have seen the mist upon the mountain side, while yet, high above it, the mountain top stood clear against the sky. Even so there shineth everlasting light upon the summit of

Mount Calvary. To that sacred hill let us lift up our eyes, for thence our help cometh. Whosoever doth mourn in Zion should repair often to the foot of the Cross. It is there we become more than conquerors over all our troubles, for it is there we best learn to cherish an unalterable persuasion that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

## XXVI.

### RETROSPECT AND ANTICIPATION.

PSALM xxiii. 6—"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

IN all literature, there is nothing more beautiful after its kind than this twenty-third psalm. For a certain sweet, yet rich artlessness, it stands unrivalled. Like the Lord's Prayer and the parable of the Prodigal Son, it falls naturally into the purest idiom of every language into which the Bible is translated, thus shewing how true it is, in both sentiment and expression, to the most universal feelings of piety. It is simple enough to be understood by children, yet manly enough to be relished by men. A psalm for the nursery, it is also a psalm for the deathbed, and, during all the chequered interval between, it retains its music and its charm. How often it sounds to the troubled heart like the soothing murmur of its own still waters, or the hush of its own green pastures, when the deep grass waves in the west wind!

At the first look we might be disposed to consider it a psalm of its author's youth, when he kept his father's flocks in the plains of Bethlehem. But upon looking again, this opinion is shaken. There are things in the psalm which are hardly consistent with it. There is, for example, an expression of gratitude to God for "restoring" his soul. This would seem to point to temptation, fall, and repentance,—the frequent falls and repentances of his humanly impulsive, but, on the whole, most pious manhood. Again, there is an allusion to "the presence of enemies," which would seem to point to days less quiet,—of greater distinction, but of less happiness,—than the peaceful, humble days of his shepherd life. And then, once more, there is an allusion also to the valley of the shadow of death, touchingly made, as if the gloom of that valley were already beginning to darken before his eyes.

It would seem from these things that probably after all it was not a psalm of David's youth, but more likely of his manhood, or even of his later age; when his hair was turning grey and his strength was failing; when the lengthening shadows were foretelling sunset; when he was learning to regard it as the greatest blessing of his life, that



whenever he had fallen the Lord had brought him to repentance; when he was thinking more of a blessed immortality than of a glorious reign, and becoming less of a warrior and more of a saint.

It is not against this that the psalm is simple. I say so for two reasons. A genuine poetic taste, the more that it is cultivated, comes to be more and more in love with simplicity. And the other reason is more important. A truly pious heart, the more it is exercised among the trials and troubles of the world, comes to be more in love with the simplest and most rudimentary truths of religion; to value less the curiosities of speculation; and to rejoice more in the plainest, broadest, simplest elements of the faith. I would be the last to say a word, which, even by implication, would seem to make light of speculation and inquiry. But the triumph of speculation and inquiry, the grandest result of all our experience of living, and of all our mental and other struggles, is when we obtain a firmer and more intelligent hold of the simple truths we were taught in our childhood, and come to say, with a deeper faith, and a better apprehension, but with equal singleness of heart,—“Our Father which art in heaven;” “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”

That the twenty-third psalm is simple, is not then an argument which at all goes to shew that it may not have been a psalm of its author's manhood, or even of the autumn of his age. And as little can this be inferred from the allusions in it to the scenes and occupations of his youth. When men grow old, they often live much in the past, and if their youth has been at all happy, it becomes more and more idealized in their memory, as the brightest part of their existence.

“Oh! through the moonlight of autumnal years,  
How sweet the back-look on our first youth-world!”

I should say, then, that if we find in this psalm vivid reminiscences of David's youth, it is nothing against the idea that it was a psalm of the autumnal years, when youth was looked back upon through the mellow moonlight. Its chastened tone answers to this supposition. Its tone of hope and confidence in the Lord makes this supposition precious. One likes to know that so long and varied an experience not only could leave, but could serve as a foundation for, such thankfulness and such anticipations.

The picture which the psalm presents to us is this:—In the distance behind lies the field of experi-

ence, strangely covered with divers half-shadowy scenes, some joyous and some sorrowful, but with the brightest light somehow strangely resting on the remotest objects,—the school where we were taught, the playground where we sported, the hazel copses, and the wild berry banks, the home in which we lived, and the faces of our parents and our playmates, strangely seen as if from another world;—in the distance before, through a golden haze, shine the turrets of a heavenly city;—in the foreground Memory holds Hope by the one hand, and, looking backward, points forward with the other, as if saying, in the language of the psalm, “surely goodness and mercy shall follow thee all the days of thy life, and thou shalt dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

The Psalmist’s anticipation is founded upon retrospect. It is the finger of memory that directs the eye of hope. “Thou *hast* covered my table and filled my cup.” “Thou *hast* anointed my head with oil.” “Thou *hast* made me to lie down among the green pastures.” These facts of his past experience were the basis on which the Psalmist rested his belief that goodness and mercy would follow him all his days. He stood upon the past to anticipate the future.

But was this all? Can we say that the fact that one has enjoyed prosperity and blessing is enough to assure him that he will continue to enjoy the same? We have no right to the good things of life that grows with lapse of time, and becomes settled by prescription. Health and wealth are bound to no man. Nor only so, but conscience suggests, sometimes in a way to startle us, that, it may be, present blessings will aggravate future condemnation, and for what has been enjoyed in sin there will be all the heavier a payment of sorrow. Most clear it is, then, that merely because, like Dives in the parable, we have received good things, we have no title to expect that the same bounty will be continued without ceasing. What is there that can cast a deeper shade upon life's closing hours than the memory of blessings unimproved?

There needs then something more than simply that our table has been covered and our cup has been filled in order to justify such a happy persuasion as that of the Psalmist. There needs that we have lived on godly principles. It is then only that the gifts we have enjoyed leave no regrets, and even the trials we have gone through, and the sorrows we have endured, come to count among the reasons upon which we base our hopes. No man can have

lived many years in the world with any degree of Christian thoughtfulness without having frequently found that he has been better, in important respects, for what was painful at the time to his flesh and blood; for disappointments which discouraged him; for losses which vexed him; for checks which humbled him; for illnesses which made him mindful of his latter end; for bereavements which made him value more the Friend from whom there is no separation. If good of the highest and purest kind has thus come out of evil in the days that are past; if fortitude has been increased in the arena of trial, and patience educated in the school of sorrow; if our battling with the troubles of life has in any measure developed our Christian manhood, then even these troubles themselves are to be reckoned among those benefactions of the past, which, as they come from a gracious and unchangeable God, give promise for the time that is to follow.

But the Psalmist tells also how the Lord had restored his soul. I understand him to refer here to the frequent occasions on which, after he had fallen into sin, it had pleased the Lord to renew him again unto repentance. To these he now looked back as among the greatest blessings of his life; to his sins

indeed with shame; but to the mercy of God in sending him those inward reproaches and outward afflictions which brought him to repentance, with the profoundest thankfulness. And could there be a stronger reason for praise, or a better ground for hope, in the case of any man? I dare say when we cast back our eye over the book, each of us of his own individual story, there are dark passages here and there on which we little like to look; pages we little like to read; chapters, of which perhaps the world has never read a letter, but which tell of things we cannot remember without shame or shuddering; of times when we harboured secret thoughts, which, had they gained a permanent inhabitation, would, we see now, have brought destruction on our souls—times when we were living in secret sin, of which we now shudder to reflect, what would have been the consequence had it obtained a final mastery. To have been saved in these emergencies, to have been restored to healthier thoughts and sounder views, to have been kept from taking the critical step which would, as it now seems, have committed us fatally to the paths of the destroyer,—what ground for endless thanksgiving to the God of mercy! what a deeper basis than any of the mere

outward amenities of life, for hope to stand upon and look up to Heaven!

In one sense the early days of David were perhaps the happiest of his whole career. Perhaps when he looked back upon them from that period of his life at which we have supposed it probable that this twenty-third psalm was written, it seemed to him that they were brighter in reality than those of his most splendid triumphs and greatest aggrandisement. Yet no man can be a youth always. No man can live always the buoyant life of that light-hearted time. One would become wearied of it, and fatigued with it. As powers ripen they demand an extended sphere and more serious occupation. Strangely enough, hardly any man, however he may speak and think of his early days with a kind of loving enthusiasm, would seriously like to return to them again and live them over once more. Let us not then look with sadness on the passing years. There is something nobler than the lightsome joys of youth in the manly feeling of work done faithfully, and battles fought boldly, of cares endured, and services performed. No matter, therefore, though, as we live on, the world in which we are seems to become more sombre; no matter though the objects around us seem to wear less roseate

hues; let us do our work with strong and patient hearts; there are pleasures which are deeper, though less sparkling, than those we remember with a sigh; the autumn has its beauty as well as the spring; there is a joy of him that reapeth as well as of him that soweth; and while the blade and the ear are for the present world, the ripe corn is for the garner of God in heaven.



## XXVII.

### A MINISTER'S PRAYER.

BEING A LETTER TO MY PEOPLE ON ST. PAUL'S PRAYER  
FOR THE EPHESIANS.

EPHESIANS iii. 17, 18, 19—"That ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

MY DEAR FRIENDS,—I wish to make this prayer of the Apostle my prayer for you. I do so because the blessing it asks is one of the highest any one can desire for those he loves. I do so because it is a blessing which it peculiarly belongs to the Christian ministry, under God's grace, and by every means of prayer and of teaching, to endeavour to provide. "To know the love of Christ;" mark the expression; not simply to know about it, but to know it; to realize it as a possession of our own; thoroughly and undoubtingly to believe, and vividly and realizingly to feel, that there is One in heaven, a living Person, to whom all power has been committed in heaven and upon the earth, and who bears us in His heart

with an affection no less true, nay, far more deep and unchangeable, than that of the most trusted fellow-creature;—what better blessing could there be? When all is going smoothly with us, and we are living on in a quiet, easy, commonplace way, we may not feel so much as we ought to do the value of Christ's love. There are times, however, in the life of every man, when the soul is forced to acknowledge that it requires support from without itself. There are times when the sense of weakness comes upon one like a faint, perhaps in the prospect of duties which seem too great for his ability, perhaps under the pressure of burdens which appear too heavy for him to bear. We know the value of human friendship in such a case. We know what a relief it is to pour our troubles or our anxieties into the ear of one in whom we can confide, who understands us, and who, we are sure, will feel for us. Such is the value of human friendship. But to know the love of Christ, how incomparably more precious still! This is to know of one who is far more sure to enter sympathizingly into all our anxiety than any human friend, and far more able to speak peace to our souls. Human friends may fail us; but Christ never. Human friends may forget us; but Christ never. Human friends may

misinterpret us; but Christ never. From human friends we may be separated; but from Christ never. Many emergencies there are, in which, however willing, our human friends cannot assist us; but none can arise too great for Him. There is a time when human friends, however steadfast, must quit our side, and there is a place in which they cannot bear us company—they cannot cross with us the river of death;—but to know the love of Christ is to know of One who can give us solace even in that last necessity. In a word, to know the love of Christ—it is might in weakness; it is patience in tribulation; it is strength for living; it is hope in dying; it is heaven brought down to earth; it is heaven dwelling within the soul.

I rejoice to regard it as the leading function of the ministerial office to proclaim the love of Christ. No doubt, there are “terrors of the Lord” which must not be kept out of view. But it is the love of Christ which supplies, or ought to supply, the great argument of the Christian teacher. “The terrors of the Lord” are to be brought forward just for the purpose of leading men to value and embrace the love of Christ. Of this we are to speak to the ignorant, that they may not continue ignorant of

what is so momentous and so blessed. Of this to the degraded and profane, as the strongest of all powers to bring them to repentance and amendment of life. Of this to the awakened, conscience-smitten sinner, as of a love not purchased by merit, nor kept back from those that have no merit, but springing from the depths of Christ's own heart, and free to all, if they will only believe it. When the faithful Christian is to be urged forward in the way of holiness, what motive can we press so powerful and affecting as the love of Christ? Or if it is our aim to help him out of the fears which may sometimes distress him, to comfort him in adversity, to cheer him on a sick-bed, or to smooth his dying pillow, it is still the love of Christ upon which we must dwell.

There is something very remarkable about the language in which the Apostle speaks of the love of Christ. It is extremely simple, yet very impressive. It is that kind of language which a man employs when his thought is too great for his words. He speaks of the "breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the love of Christ. Now, this is just such phraseology as a man would take refuge in, when unable to express the greatness of his own idea. It is just such language as any

of us might employ, if, going out into the fields on some clear autumn night, and looking up at the vast concave of the sky, with its countless shining worlds, we were to strive to give expression to the sense that filled us of the grandeur and immensity of the works of God. What could we say, but just in similar words to those of the Apostle—"O the breadth and the length, and the depth and the height," of this great universe!

The Apostle's language, then, conveys the idea that the love of Christ is infinite. And infinite indeed it is. The more one tries to grasp it, the more one cannot. Who can measure the distance between heaven and earth?—yet through all that distance He descended to redeem us. May God in His mercy forbid that we should ever understand the depth of anguish in the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—yet all that anguish He endured for our sake.

In another way also the language of the Apostle conveys the idea that Christ's love is infinite. When he speaks of its breadth and length, and depth and height, he speaks, you will observe, as from a centre point. There are breadth and length on either side of him, there is height above him, and depth beneath his feet. And

not only does he speak as from a centre point in which he himself is standing, but his prayer for the Ephesians is, that each of them might feel that he too, and in common with all the saints, was in a similar position. The prayer is, that they, *with all saints*, might be able to comprehend Christ's love. Now, what is that which has its centre everywhere? Nothing but that which is infinite. A limited space can have only one centre. There is only one spot which is the centre of a church, or a city, or our island, or the globe. But infinite space has its centre everywhere. Here where I am there is infinite space above, beneath, before, behind me; where you are it is the same; it would be the same were you to go to the other side of the world; it would be the same were you to ascend among the stars. Thus also in regard to infinite time. There is only one moment which is the middle moment of a day, a year, a lifetime, the duration of the world. But every moment is the centre of eternity. At this moment there is an eternity past, and an eternity to come. It was the same a hundred years ago; it will be the same a hundred years hence. It was the same when Adam drew his first breath; it will be the same when the archangel sounds the last trumpet. I am aware that the analogy is not perfect between such conceptions as

those of time and space, and such an emotion as that of love; nevertheless, these rude illustrations may help us in some measure to realize how, because of the very greatness of His infinite nature, not one of us is beyond the embrace of our Redeemer's love, but we are all, and we are each, in the centre of it, and each may believe himself as much the object of it as if he were alone in creation.

The Apostle prays that we may know a love, of which he tells us immediately afterwards that it "passeth knowledge." It does indeed pass knowledge; we cannot know it adequately to its extent. But do we know it adequately to our own capacities and necessities? Have we entered into it as far as we are able, or might be able? Is it the source of joy to us that it might be? Is it the source of strength to us that it might be? Are we resting in it as we might rest in it? If you plunge a vessel into the ocean, you do not expect to take up in that vessel the whole of the mighty waters. But at least you may take up the fill of your vessel. Have we taken up our fill out of the great ocean of the love of Christ? Here there is room then for the Apostle's prayer, and here there is occasion why we should use it as our own prayer for ourselves and for one another. More prayerfulness,

more frequent communion with God, more frequent visits to the foot of the cross, would enlighten our minds in the knowledge of the Divine love so as to give us an inward rest and joy of which we have as yet only the faintest conception. Like the first few pieces of ore, much mingled it may be with worthless refuse, that shew where the mine of precious metal is, all that the most advanced among us have yet obtained of a comforting and sanctifying comprehension of the love of Christ, amounts to little more than a faint indication of the unsearchable riches that remain to reward our further efforts and our further prayers. Nay, indeed, there is room for an endless progression in Christian blessedness throughout all eternity. For just because the love of Christ passeth knowledge—just because it can never be grasped in all the magnitude of its amazing dimensions by the finite soul of any creature—just on that ground I delight myself in believing that there will be a progress in the bliss of heaven, and that, when we come to engage in the services, and to be conversant with the revelations of eternity, there will be endless accessions made to that deepest happiness, of which the knowledge of redeeming love is the fountain alike here below, and doubtless also in the world above.



Let me ask you to notice yet further what the mode was in which the Apostle expected that the Ephesians would arrive at that more enlarged and vivid comprehension of the love of Christ which he prayed for in their behalf. He prayed, you will observe, that they "being rooted and grounded in love"—having, that is, the spirit of love formed and growing within themselves—might be able to comprehend the love of Christ. He does not pray for any new revelation. He does not ask for any proof of the love of Christ to be given to them, beyond the proof he had himself been privileged to place before their minds when he preached the Cross among them. But what he prays for is, that the same spirit of love which dwelt in Christ, might be formed and increased in them, and then, as a result of this, the sense of Christ's love would come into their hearts more abundantly. They would grow in the knowledge of it through growing into its likeness. It would reveal itself to them more and more through becoming more and more a living thing in their own bosoms.

There is here a deep philosophy. We can know another, whether that other be a fellow-creature or the Divine Being, only through his like within ourselves. People of dissimilar dispositions constantly

misunderstand one another, and put false constructions upon one another. Some one performs a great deed of Christian charity—makes a great sacrifice for the good of his fellow-creatures—is drawn by the cords of love, from the midst, perhaps, of affluence and luxury, to go down among the wretched and the suffering, and make it his life's work to relieve their distresses; to many, such a person is a puzzle and a mystery; they cannot understand him; they cannot enter into motives which are without an explanation in their own breasts; it is fanaticism; it is love of popularity; it is love of notoriety; it is anything rather than that single-hearted honest love of man of which there is so little in their own bosoms, that they cannot comprehend how it should ever be kindled into such warmth. It is thus that the spirit of self in a man often judges most erroneously of the spirit of love in another man; that spirit of love which is the Spirit of God. And just as the spirit of self in a man is thus unable to form a correct estimate of the Spirit of God in a fellow-man, so neither can it enter with any appreciation into the Spirit of God in Christ. It is love that understands love. It is Christ in a man that apprehends and appreciates Christ revealed outwardly. The Christ of the Bible mani-

festes Himself, and by the laws of human nature, can manifest Himself, only to His own image formed in the heart. You may read much in the Scriptures, and may be able to speak and think with a degree of propriety about the love of the Redeemer, but you will know it, know it realizingly and in the fulness of its bliss-giving power, only in proportion as there is that within you which resembles it, and you are filled with the same mind which prompted Him to come into the world, and suffer, and die. If the question were proposed, how is it that Christian people are often in possession of so little of the comfort which a sense of the love of Christ would give? one reason, I think, might be fixed upon without much hesitation. They read the Bible, and go to church, and listen to sermons. But they would read with a clearer eye if it were oftener washed with the tear of sympathy in the house of the mourner; they would listen with a more appreciating ear if it were oftener filled with the sorrows of the poor, and the griefs of the distressed.

I have compared the human mind engaged in the contemplation of redeeming love to a small vessel plunged into the ocean. To make the simile complete, we ought to suppose that the vessel is

made of some expansible material. Contracted by long drought, it will not hold so much as it was made for. It will not take in up to the measure of its proper capacity. It takes up at first only a little. But under the influence of that little it swells and is enlarged. Then it takes up more, and still it enlarges; and thus the process goes on; and as we grow in grace, we grow likewise in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. The two growths go on together, each helping and hastening the other. You believe in the love of Christ; it stimulates in you the love of your brethren, and the spirit of compassion and kindness towards all men; and just as these feelings increase, the apprehension of Christ's love becomes more vivid; and thus, by a parallel and equal progress, these advance together your resemblance to the Lord, and your peace and joy in believing.

Here I close these Counsels. I close them by recommending that spirit of love which is ever spoken of in the New Testament as the very life of God in man. With a view to the highest welfare of his people, I am sure there is no exhortation a minister can better give, than when he counsels them to add to their diligent use of the ordinary means of grace, to their searching of the Scriptures, and to

their public and their private prayers, some practical Christian work, some practical cultivation of the spirit of love. The heart will not do the work of the head, nor the head that of the heart; but it is when head and heart work together that the whole man grows and is strengthened, and approaches towards that perfection which consisteth both in knowledge and in love. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

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